

THE THISTLES OF MOUNT CEDAR



Ursula Tannenforst



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The Thistles of Mount Cedar

“Altogether the most important period in the life of an individual is that of development. Afterwards comes the conflict with the world; and that is interesting only in its results.”—*Goethe: Conversations with Eckermann, 1824.*



In the Garden of Mount Cedar.

The Thistles of Mount Cedar

A Story of School-Life for Girls

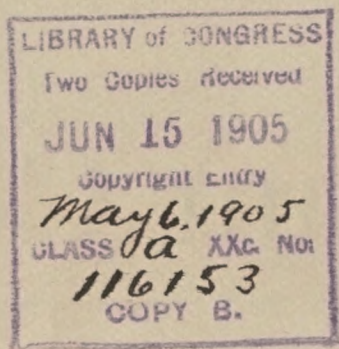
By Ursula Tannenforst *psued.*
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The Thistles of Mount Cedar

CHAPTER I.

A NEW ARRIVAL.

“GIRLS! Thistles, where are you hiding?” cried a merry maiden of fifteen as she ran in the afternoon sunshine along a wide, flag-paved walk leading towards a summer-house at the farther end of the grounds of Mount Cedar Seminary—a successful institute for turning out strong, healthy scholars, if this one might be taken as a specimen. She was tall, perfectly proportioned, full of buoyant vigor, with broad chest, brilliant complexion and column-like throat. Her features were regular, her mouth large but finely cut. Her clear, dark gray eyes looked out over the blossoming garden and the wide view beyond with a calm, steady gaze of quiet satis-

faction arising rather from animal spirits than from any especial heed of the lovely prospect. Rich, wavy, light brown hair, turned back from her forehead with a comb, hung upon her shoulders. Her simple dress was worn with a certain stylishness. Swinging her broad hat in one hand, she stood a moment, glancing back towards the tall gray school-building, with its widespreading wings, upon the hilltop; then called "Girls!" again, and, receiving an answer from some distance, ran on until she reached the summer-house, occupied by a group of pupils assembled during the afternoon recess for the ostensible purpose of reading aloud; but their book lay unheeded on the table, while a dozen merry voices were busily chattering, discussing and contradicting each other. A general exclamation of "Cornie Freeman!" greeted the newcomer as she appeared at the door.

"I thought I should find you!" panted Cornie, smiling. "Why didn't you say you were coming here, and save me the trouble of hunting for you? Now, Fanny Fox, just please tell me what you are grinning at."

These last words were addressed to a slight, dark, roguish-looking girl of about Cornie's age, whose piquant features were convulsed by a suppressed titter as she replied, in a would-be solemn tone:

"Why, of course we never dreamed of ask-

ing you to join us. We knew that you wouldn't need us Thistles now that Kate has come back."

"Such nonsense!" Cornie went on, in her strong, clear voice. "As if I didn't want a share in all that's going, whether Kate is here or not! Besides, she's busy enough with that new girl, showing her everything—she looks as if she came from foreign parts, poor little mite, I'm sure!"

A laugh greeted this observation, and the dark-eyed, *espiègle*-looking Fanny Fox exclaimed, "Poor Cornie, she's jealous! She has lost her old friend, so she has come to us. Walk in, dear, and we'll comfort you."

"Thank you," said Cornie, standing still, "but I prefer to guard the door. And you all say yourselves that I don't know what jealousy means; and, as for losing Kate, it is good fun to see her doing the honors of the place like a model girl. She wanted me to help; but I thought the new arrival would thrive best with one of her own small size, and——"

"Tell us about her, Cornie—her name, and age, and so forth," interrupted several eager voices at once. Two or three elder girls took up their book and made a vain effort to restore silence; but Cornie, looking roguishly important, went on:

"Her surname is Forster, and her Christian name, or, at least, all I can remember, for she

is half foreign, and has ever so many, is something strange—Verena—and Kate says she is past fourteen, though, like herself, she looks about ten. Her father was an American, a civil engineer, who went to Hungary on business, long ago, and married a Hungarian lady for his second wife. Verena's mother and her twin brother both died when she was only six; so she was sent to a Moravian school in Germany for three years and then to some Hungarian seminary, where she stayed until her father's death, more than eighteen months ago. Then her troubles began again; for she was left to the guardianship of her half-brother, more than twenty years older than herself, a country doctor, who lives in a gloomy old house in some out-of-the-way place, and who sent for her very soon, because he has some notion about wanting to make her into an American. But you can see that she will always be a foreigner; and she bewitched our romantic Kate at first sight, as I told you, when she met her during her heavy Easter visit to her uncle the Professor's terribly scientific home."

"Oh, yes; you had a gushing letter while she was in New York," broke in another, "and you heard how Kate went, with her cousin, to a schoolgirl's party, and met two girls named Fleming, great beauties, crazy about art, and all the things that Kate raves over. And she

saw this Hungarian, who was staying with the Flemings, and lost her heart to her."

"Exactly!" laughed Cornie. "Kate's craze is everything foreign; so she fell in love with the Flemings, who have always lived abroad. They came here only for a winter, because their father had to look after some lawsuit he has just won. So they are going back to Germany, and wanted poor Verena to go with them—it seems she is some sort of a connection through their mother, who is half a German, but her brother positively refused. Then they tried to make him send her to school, because, as Kate says, everyone knows what a terrible time the child has at home between his vulgar wife and her grim, sermonizing, old Scotch mother. They asked Professor Armstrong to recommend our school, which he did so successfully that the little Hungarian orphan has been sent here at last. Poor child, how strange and wild she looks."

"Wild enough, just the sort of subject for treating to a pie-bed, or salt and flour sprinkled on her pillow," maliciously suggested a sharp-looking girl, whose seventeen years did not seem to have brought with them the contempt for such childish tricks felt by the class to which she belonged. "Suppose we try to get up a little fun."

No one seconded this proposal, for Julia

Maxwell, famed for her disagreeable speeches and her teasing propensities, was thoroughly disliked by all her younger schoolmates, who would never have joined with her in such nonsense, though themselves often not disinclined thereunto.

“Never mind that now!” Elisabeth Armstrong, a tall, dark, handsome girl of eighteen, the head of the school, began, somewhat sternly and abruptly. “We came here intending to read.”

Cornie’s comely face sparkled with mischief, and she would probably have said something ill-calculated to gratify the grave Elisabeth’s overweening self-importance, but the irrepressible Fanny Fox broke in:

“Never mind those two old girls! Let us think of the new one. I have made up a romance about her. She must not be a Thistle—oh, no! She must personate a character utterly indispensable in good, old-fashioned juvenile fiction, and which, as we know, our school has been pining for so very long. I mean, of course, the good pattern child, who is to reform us all, and return snubs with angelic meekness, and, perhaps, save somebody’s life—our dear Julia’s, or Elisabeth’s, for example—and die at last, with a great scene and fuss. We never had one yet like that; poor little Virginia Leslie came rather near it in some things,

but, you know, she died at home, in the holidays; so we missed the climax, though she did pretty well for the part, which isn't easy here. First and foremost, she managed to keep Katharine Gordon Armstrong, now the most prickly and incorrigible of Thistles, in something like order. Secondly, my dear Julia, she never joined in any practical jokes. Thirdly——”

Fanny was interrupted by peals of laughter, but she continued, in her would-be solemn voice:

“Not that I enjoy the prospect. No more ‘cakes and ale’—don’t be shocked, young ladies, I only mean candy sucked under our desk lids and apples munched after we go to bed. No more tricks on poor Dorinda or brisk pillow fights before the Dragon comes upstairs. No. I foresee the decline of our Thistles’ most cherished fun.”

“And I say that we’ll have more than ever,” Cornie protested gayly. “When did a wild-looking girl like this ever come to school and begin to set an example? She will be a prickly Thistle soon enough.”

“If you mean to make her such an outlaw as yourselves, I hope you mayn’t succeed,” rudely muttered Elisabeth, loud enough to be heard by all. Several looked annoyed, and Fanny was about to speak, but Cornie, too

cheerful and easy-going to mind "Queen Bess," preserved peace for the moment by continuing her narrative of what she had heard from Kate concerning the newcomer, adding that Kate seemed so taken by this girl, and so sure of a romance in real life at last, that they would have fine fun in watching the progress of her fancy. The others laughed assent; but Elisabeth again muttered, "Fun? Yes, that is all you ever care about!"

"Who would suppose," cried Fanny, "that this indignant protest arose from anything but the purest sisterly affection and anger at the idea of our getting fun out of Kate? No, Elisabeth, we understand you far too well, my dear! Kate's concerns are not in the least important to you; what you don't relish is our light, frivolous tone, which jars unpleasantly upon your own most serene intellectual loftiness."

Julia Maxwell whispered slyly with her chief friend, nearly all the rest laughed, Cornie nodded to Fanny, who, greatly encouraged, proceeded to develop her theory that the new scholar should become a model girl, adorning her romance with so much lively nonsense as to again draw peals of mirth from all save Elisabeth, who pretended to bury herself in their long-neglected book. Suddenly a rustling was heard in the branches of a pine tree overhanging the doorway, and Cornie, looking up,

beheld a tiny figure standing far aloft on one of the boughs, holding fast to another just above her head, while she swayed softly to and fro.

"It's only the Brownie," she explained; while the girl, lowering herself through the branches in a way that betokened good gymnastic training, dropped lightly on the grass. "Never mind."

"Isabel, you have been listening," said Elisabeth, with some severity.

"No," said the child (a pupil of twelve, called the Brownie by Kate, who liked fanciful nicknames, because of her rich brunette coloring and cheerful, helpful disposition, always glad to be of use). "Kate sent me here, Cornie, to look for you; but when I saw you all talking in council I thought I wasn't wanted, and climbed up for a swing till you were through."

"Well," said Cornie, mildly, "and what does Kate want me for?"

"Only to come over yonder and help the new girl to feel at home."

"Kate has grown hospitable, and virtuous, and altruistic all of a sudden in most alarming style," broke in Fanny. "She never took so much trouble with a new girl before—not even for you, Cornie, when you came all the way from St. Paul, Minnesota, wasn't it?—and you took to each other, and it seemed so funny, because she was so little and you were so big.

You see, I was right; the spell is beginning to work. Take care, my good Cornie, lest this new arrival should cut you out. You had better hurry to see how things are going over yonder, where that new Thistle is tearing about with Kate."

"If this is meant for a polite way of getting rid of me, all I can say is that you can't make me jealous or blind me by your wonderful attempts at diplomacy, or scare me by your absurd suggestions," answered Cornie merrily, shaking her rich locks. "Come, Brownie; let us go."

CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG FOREIGNER.

THERE was a part of the spacious grounds of Mount Cedar, beside the paling fence of the kitchen garden, beyond which the forbidden region of "out of bounds" began, where the drooping boughs of fruit trees, now laden with blossoms, and the scattered firs, remnants of a grove long since cleared away, lent the spot a certain air of privacy and remoteness. Here stood two girls in front of a low upright trellis covered with budding vines, looking out into the western sky across the sloping garden, and talking in eager tones, with restless glances and quick, sudden motions betraying both a keen capacity for enjoyment and a degree of nervous excitability far too great for their age of fourteen, and still more for their stature, which was that of barely ten. Twin-like in size, in all other things they were a contrast. The Hungarian was a child sure to attract attention by her striking grace and picturesqueness, though some persons might have thought her too dark and wild-looking; yet her face betokened great intelligence and was

already rich in its own peculiar beauty. Her clear olive skin, black, wavy hair, her fine, slightly aquiline, but neither sharp nor heavy features, and straight, resolute, black eyebrows over very dark gray eyes, with black lashes, would have marked her as a foreigner at first sight; so would her swift, unconscious gestures, the slight accent in her otherwise perfect English, and the tones of her deep, rich voice.

Her companion was fair enough for a Scandinavian, with large, bright blue eyes, set rather far apart under a fine forehead, and a rich mass of pale golden hair, turned back with a comb and curling on her shoulders. Her features were ordinary, and her general appearance that of a plain though intelligent girl, whose countenance suggested an imaginative nature, with tastes and feelings precociously developed for her years, and a certain mournfulness of expression, save when strongly excited—which latter condition, it may be mentioned, occurred so often that Kate Armstrong pretty generally deserved the *sobriquet* given her by Fanny Fox of Kate Headstrong, and had long been an acknowledged leader in pranks among the “Thistles,” as she called her own set of girls.

“Yes,” Kate was saying in answer to Verena’s praises of the rolling landscape, in the clear light of the mild, late-April after-

noon. "Here it is always beautiful, but nothing now to what it will be in summer. You expect to stay here through the vacation, don't you?"

"I'll do anything sooner than be sent home," cried Verena fiercely, raising her graceful head and shaking her heavy raven hair, while a look of defiant pain drew down the corners of her firm yet delicate mouth.

"I am so glad! A great many girls stay then—orphans like you and me," said Kate, in a business-like tone, changing into eagerness as she went on. "We have good times then; the rules are relaxed and we have picnics, and make excursions, and sit out of doors in the evenings, and sing, and——" Kate stopped abruptly, struck by her companion's face.

"Now, Verena," she went on, blushing slightly, "don't be vexed if I tell you something. If you want to have any peace don't ever talk much about the view, and the sunsets, and the singing, and the things you really love best, to the other girls as you do to me. They are generally good-natured, but nine-tenths of them don't care for such things as you and I do. You would only get taken down, even by the nice girls, with a douche of cold water in the midst of any enthusiasm. And those big, hateful, sarcastic, sneering ones—Julia Maxwell, and Cecilia Morgan, and their set, whom Cornie and

I detest, and call 'Julia & Co.'—for they are leagued against us—would laugh and play off their jokes on you, and make fun of the things you love best, and that's ten times harder to bear than being only laughed at for oneself."

"I know," said Verena, slowly, and as though painfully looking back upon something. "Schools in Europe may often be the same as schools here in those things, for the sneering girls are everywhere. But I liked my Hungarian seminary and hated having to leave it; though, if I must be in America, I would rather be here than at my brother's. But you, Kate—you are not like the other girls; I knew it at once."

"No," said Kate, half sadly. "I never feel just like them. I love so many fanciful things, and I never have seemed to myself to be really an American—I mean I ought to belong to some other country. And I am glad you understand it—so glad!"

Verena, half amused and half touched by Kate's earnestness, made a silent gesture of assent, while her friend went on eagerly, "There's so much in knowing how to take these girls at the start. They're not formidable if you talk nonsense, and laugh, and keep quiet about anything that really stirs you. Here comes the Brownie, dear child, and my good, delightful Cornie, both angels—only remember what I said to you."

“Well!” broke in Cornie’s merry voice, “here I am, at your service.”

Kate smiled and Verena scanned Cornie’s rosy face with a searching look from under her dark eyebrows. But little Brownie, who had been darting hither and thither like a bird, rushed up to her new schoolfellow, twining one arm round her waist, while with the other she seized Kate.

“Never mind talking; the bell will ring soon. We might show her the gymnasium. Cornie, will you lead the way and take care of us?”

Verena looked all eagerness at mention of the gymnasium, but, to Kate’s relief, confined herself to a quiet assent, and the four girls mounted to the large hall on the top story of one of the wings. Brownie opened the door, but instantly drew back, with a woe-begone face.

“They’re in there! All the Nettles, waiting to pounce on us.”

“Too bad!” muttered Kate. “Never mind; it won’t do to notice them.”

“They won’t get the better of me!” pronounced Cornie, with energy. “Don’t seem to mind them, Verena, but come on.”

Verena nodded, feeling a sort of combative excitement at the prospect; while Cornie, throwing open the door, marched in with a bold front towards the enemy, who were grouped at the farther end of the long room, leaning

against some horizontal bars in front of a large window, or seated on the mattress underneath. One small, agile figure kept swiftly flying to and fro on the rings along the center of the gymnasium; and Kate, with dismay, recognized the dreaded *esprit fort* of her own class, Fanny Fox.

“So you’ve turned bear-leader to that wild little cub, have you?” she whispered, as Cornie passed, and her own feet touched the platform at the end of the line of rings, while she paused for breath. Verena, whose senses were remarkably acute, caught the words, but, checking her impulse to utter an unwise rejoinder to the effect that the young bear in question did not intend to suffer being teased and baited for the general amusement, quietly slipped her thin, nervous fingers into the ring just released from Fanny’s grasp, and in another moment was lightly swinging across the room.

“She’s a match for you, Foxey!” laughed Cornie to Fanny, who, folding her arms, stood looking after the new scholar, not without admiration, as, having reached the upper end of the gymnasium, she dropped from the ring, and, perching herself upon the bars, instantly became the center of a set of critics whose innumerable questions seemed to be met by answers sufficiently clever to preserve her from the merciless teasing dreaded for her by Kate,

now watching her from afar, and withheld from drawing nearer by Cornie, who clasped and held her with a pair of strong arms; while Fanny, echoing her very thoughts, exclaimed: "Nonsense, let her go, she can push her way well enough, and you know that, though you may be very high in your classes, you've no talent for smart repartees, such as are needed just now over yonder, my dear!"

Cornie and Fanny, attracted by curiosity, soon approached the group at the window, releasing Kate, who presently beheld her new friend join Fanny in performing a variety of gymnastic feats with a dexterity awakening the admiration of all spectators, and entirely removing from Kate's mind the last fear lest the young foreigner should display any nervous shyness or other qualities likely to lead her into trouble. How beautiful Verena looked, Kate thought, swinging easily along on the rings, her face flushed with excitement, her black hair curling on her forehead and streaming far behind under its fluttering scarlet ribbon, her tiny, agile form, in a gray red-trimmed short skirt and scarlet blouse, rising and falling in a rhythmic motion that suggested music. Kate scarcely could believe that this was the lonely, melancholy girl whom she had met during the holidays, whose weak, henpecked half-brother had soon wearied of her frequent conflicts with

his unruly boys, and left her to fight her own battles with his wife and mother-in-law, who were glad to get her out of the house. Verena had had real misfortunes; yet her attractive personality was already smoothing for her the first steps of her new school-life, while arousing a pang of mournful envy in Kate's heart. It was guileless envy; Kate would not have wished her to be less beautiful, less able to make her way; yet she herself could not help feeling just a little lonely, and unimportant, and left out.

Over-sensitive and imaginative, there was not much chance of Kate ever being too happy, or that life at a large school could be without many secret trials utterly unknown to Cornie's calm healthfulness or Brownie's quiet, gentle soul. High animal spirits, however, and extreme volatility often made her seem the gayest of the gay; and no one who watched her now, swinging after Verena along the rings, or leaping on the springing-board, would have taken her to be anything but a lively girl of about ten, or have guessed what capacities for strange extremes of wild mirth and profound sadness lay concealed beneath that childish and in no way remarkable exterior.

Active motion, as usual, raised her spirits; yet she could not help feeling slightly vexed when, as the bell rang, Verena allowed Fanny

Fox to put an arm around her waist and run out of the room with her, never casting a glance at Kate as she silently followed, silently reflecting that she seemed almost certain to get into trouble by trying to serve anybody, in spite of all that was said about the happiness of doing good.

But the Hungarian's high spirits and cool ease of manner subsided into most exemplary quiet at supper, when she had to face the entire school. Soon after a bell rang, and all who had not finished their lessons for the morrow had to leave the cheerful "long parlor," where their more industrious comrades were talking, reading or playing games under the mild supervision of the French teacher, and betake themselves to the schoolroom.

Mrs. Hill, the Principal of Mount Cedar, was kind-hearted, cultivated, eager to do her duty; but delicate health, together with a certain innate timidity and a lurking doubt as to her fitness for a position she had only assumed from necessity, rendered her far more of a nominal than a real ruler, the chief authority and management for years past having devolved more and more upon the first English teacher, Miss Clive.

Whatever defects of character might lessen Mrs. Hill's influence, Miss Clive was free from, since she was always erring in the opposite

direction, with the errors of a nature full of strong, positive qualities, ardor and vitality. Earnest, sincere, quick to take offence and to forgive, the healthy moral and religious influence she strove to exercise upon the pupils was too often marred and neutralized by a certain hastiness of temper and a frequent lack both of tact and judgment. Full of hobbies, it was fortunate that most of them took the direction of uniting a thorough physical education with the intellectual one. She allowed no fashionable follies. Her girls, large and small, were clad in simple, comfortable uniforms, the classes distinguished by colored belts and the various badges of merit she delighted to bestow. She enforced plenty of outdoor exercise and gymnastic training. Greatly admired by her scholars, her occasional wilfulness led her often into words and actions which made them justly feel angry and provoked. Handsome, talented and still young, she was sometimes carried away by a certain dramatic vein in her nature which led her to promote a spirit of emulation by every variety of outward stimulus. Early thrown upon her own resources, she had never proved unequal to any call for exertion, and had scarcely ever been for a moment shaken in her own self-confidence. Mrs. Hill and the under-teachers usually yielded to her almost as a matter of course. Eager to develop the girls'

talents to the utmost, and to stimulate every brilliant faculty, that meek, patient, industrious mediocrity which Dr. Arnold so revered in his boys was too apt to be overlooked by her amid the all-absorbing intellectual excitement that was at once her weakness and her strength.

Verena, awaiting orders, had seated herself at the desk she was to occupy beside Kate, when the door opened and Miss Clive, tall, stylish, finely made, with handsome features, dark hair piled on top of the well-shaped head that surmounted a remarkably erect and rather military-looking figure, and bright black eyes famed for seeing everything and darting terror into every culprit's heart, advanced up the long room, with her quick yet stately step, and, laying her hand on Verena's shoulder, summoned her to follow her to Mrs. Hill at once.

Verena sprang up, awed by Miss Clive's face, voice and touch, but striving hard to seem unconcerned while she was led away to the platform at the upper end of the room, where Mrs. Hill, a tall, pale, sickly-looking, though not unattractive elderly woman, sat waiting to test her new scholar's proficiency in various branches of knowledge.

"They look like Greenough's Angel and Child," whispered Kate, glancing after them.

"No," said Cornie, who, though fluent and ready in everything practical, was slow at

study; "not the guardian angel *I* would choose! She is more like a drill-sergeant, always talking about being a soldier's daughter and a soldier's sister—and I wish she were one herself, instead of playing at being general and policeman here."

"She gets soldiering enough," put in Fanny, "what with the brains and the tempers she has to deal with." (The allusion to "brains" probably was meant for Cornie, while the "tempers" referred to Kate).

Verena, meanwhile, was undergoing an educational catechism, inwardly rather nervous, but acquitting herself well. Mrs. Hill was always gentle unless she felt bound to reprove; but Miss Clive, although inclined to admire the new scholar, maintained a severe demeanor for the sake of authority.

"So you are half Hungarian, are you?" she repeated sternly, as though detecting Verena in something wrong. "You speak the language and German, too, and you say you have read a great deal. Can you recite poetry?"

"Certainly; in Magyar, if you like," calmly replied Verena, sufficiently loud for the listening troop of girls to hear.

Forty pairs of eager eyes were turned upon her in amazement, causing the excitable child's heart to beat quickly as she stood motionless.

Miss Clive's secret surprise was quite equal

to that of the pupils, so, without waiting for the sensation to exhaust itself, she curtly bade Verena to recite some short piece of poetry if she could.

Merely saying that she would repeat a patriotic poem by Petöfi, translated by Sir John Bowring as "One Only Thought," Verena began to declaim the lines, her assumed quietness passing involuntarily into uncontrollable ardor. Her deep, rich, finely modulated voice lent a strange charm to the foreign words that no one but herself understood; her fiery enthusiasm and dramatic, though half-unconscious gestures riveted the attention of every girl in the room as, starting from their seats, they crowded round the platform, and, for once unhidden by Miss Clive, stood breathless, in a semi-circle, watching that small, graceful figure, conspicuous as if upon a stage. Fanny Fox looked on with admiring eyes, Cornie seemed interested, but Kate, utterly amazed at her new friend's developments, stood bending forward in the front row, among taller companions, wildly wishing that she herself had such a face, a talent and a voice. She was the only girl present who had read the poem in English, or could connect any ideas with the strange yet melodious sounds issuing from the lips of the young Hungarian, who seemed to be an actress born.

Miss Clive's dark eyes rested with deep inter-

est on Verena's glowing face; but she praised her in few words, while Mrs. Hill sent back the excited girls to their desks, where they exchanged low comments.

"She seems a fine, spirited little thing," began Fanny, following Kate's thoughtful blue eyes as they watched Verena, still being questioned on the platform. "Look how the General (a name for Miss Clive) scans every movement! She's taking stock of our new Thistle's capabilities for the acting—and then, Katie darling, just take care lest you should find your own dear little nose put out of joint!"

Kate, pretending to study, made no reply, for teasing "Foxy" had expressed her own secret fear. The grand half-yearly frolic of the school consisted in acting a little French play before breaking up. The "Nettles," or "stuck-up, hateful ones," as the Thistles called their enemies, always strove for the best parts, often with success. Kate herself, not being particularly good-looking, and being a prominent Thistle into the bargain, would have had small chance of a rôle save for her high standing with Madame Verrier, the French teacher, and only through her influence, so that she always suffered untold anxiety beforehand lest she should be crowded out. Here, then, was a fresh source of uneasiness; and she underwent a cruel struggle between her real

liking for Verena and the dread of being deprived of her dearest enjoyment.

And yet Kate would hardly have envied Verena could she have read her thoughts when study-time was over and they rejoined the others in the parlor, where Miss Clive read prayers in her full, clear voice. Verena, between Fanny and Kate, neither of whom, it must be owned, seemed to be much imbued with reverence, could not help contrasting this scene with the unhappy home she had quitted, and to which, her school days ended, she feared that, although not financially dependent on her half-brother, she must return. At the country day-school she had recently attended, Verena had been the wildest of romping rebels; at home she sought comfort and solace by plunging into all sorts of books, wishing that her own sordid, fretting and commonplace trials were something fine and romantic, like what she had read about in poetry. And when the school of eighty girls, led by Miss Clive, rose and sang a hymn to the accompaniment of an organ, played by Madame Verrier, the young stranger's unrest increased until only the excitement of singing saved her from sobbing, envying, as she did, those other girls, who, as she fancied, had had a happier past than hers, and might look forward to a brighter future.

The dormitory of Verena's class was a large,

airy room, divided into alcoves, with curtained doorways. Kate, with Fanny and Cornie, plunged wildly into the one assigned to the Hungarian, turning everything topsy-turvy in order to see that no tricks had been played, and, having satisfied themselves that all was in order, wished her good-night, and retired to their respective cells. Miss Almira, a prim-looking teacher, seated herself, book in hand, beneath the shaded light in the center of the long room, and silence soon reigned.

CHAPTER III.

MEMORIES AND NOVELTIES.

“**T**HERE she goes, with her attendant evil spirit, while her guardian angel dismally watches her from a distance!” exclaimed Fanny Fox. “Poor, good, serious-minded Agnes Leslie—it’s hard for her to have her last term here embittered by seeing Kate, her *protégée* of old times, carried off by that wild little elf, and her pranks redoubled.”

Cornie nodded a careless assent, while listening to some schoolgirl chatter, too merry and easy-going to grieve over what “Foxey” chose to term Kate’s desertion of her for a new friend. The Hungarian, in a few days, had grown perfectly at home, striking up a vehement intimacy with Kate, who, in her turn, was absorbed by the delight of finding some one who could understand her own strange, dreamy vein of thought. Verena, when alone with her, was confiding, sympathetic, eager to talk about Europe, books and poetry. Among the other girls she was self-contained, daring, bold and headstrong; so that the character of the “This-

bles," by no means high, seemed likely to suffer from her wild example.

Midway in age between the older and younger scholars, Kate, owing to her small size and childish aspect, occupied rather an anomalous position in the school. High in nearly all her studies, among classmates mostly her seniors by a year or two, when once out of the school-room her animal spirits led her to seek fun and frolic among the youngest madcaps, or "Junior Thistles," to the dismay of her sister, Elisabeth, who had no influence over her, and thought it shocking that she should wish to remain a child so long.

Racing down the shady walk during morning recess, Verena and Kate dashed into the summer house, to their horror finding it occupied by Julia & Co. Breathless and speechless, Kate leaned against the door, her chest heaving beneath her dark-blue flannel blouse, upon which sparkled a large gold locket, usually worn only on Sundays and holidays. The bright glitter caught Julia Maxwell's eye, and she began, in her sarcastic tone:

"So, child, you have your precious amulet on to-day, have you?" taking advantage of Kate's panting condition to seize the locket and open it, while another teasing girl held down the arms of its owner, vainly struggling to withdraw.

“Don’t wriggle so, we won’t steal it!” cried Cecilia Morgan; while Julia went on, “We want to see the charm, or whatever it is, inside. Oh! you needn’t flush, and stamp, and cry; your new friend has deserted you; so you’ll have to take it quietly!”

Kate, glancing round, beheld Verena speeding along the walk. It was not like her to run away, and Kate vaguely hoped her gone in search of reinforcements, struggling meanwhile to keep from flying into an impotent rage, which would have redoubled the mirth of her tormentors. Ordinary teasing she could have borne; but this locket was her most precious treasure, containing the hair and portrait of her first friend at school, about whom she had been telling the Hungarian that very morning.

When Kate had entered Mount Cedar, five years before, her constant companion was a little English Canadian, a delicate child of nine, sent away from the biting winters of her home—Virginia Leslie, the only sister of Agnes. Intelligent, affectionate and well trained, she soon gained a wholesome influence over Kate, whose home discipline, mainly directed towards stimulating her intellect, had left her heart and deeper life comparatively untouched. It was after Virginia’s somewhat sudden death that Kate, at twelve years old, fell into a profound dejection, from which at first it seemed as if

nothing could arouse her. As regarded her own conduct, it might have been better if a touch of this melancholy, full of pure and happy memories, could have lasted longer, for when, in a few months, she slowly regained her spirits, she became less studious, more wilful and a source of anxiety to her teachers. In the autumn Cornie Freeman arrived from her Western home, a healthy, joyous creature, liked by all, and by degrees growing to be Kate's intimate associate. Yet it was intolerable to see this locket, formerly Virginia's, and, after her death, sent by her mother to Kate, with its first owner's miniature inside, rudely handed about and criticised with many flippant speeches, while Kate herself writhed powerlessly in the strong grasp of Cecilia, who had drawn her upon her lap, with both arms round her.

"Let me go, you hateful girl!" she cried passionately; while Julia went on, "So this is her talisman that she makes so much fuss about!"

"She oughtn't to wear it to-day," added Cecilia. "You know how Fanny calls it her badge of merit, that she never dares to put on unless she's good;" while Julia rejoined, "Then she's right to wear it, for, if she kept it for a sign of goodness, she'd have to wait uncommonly long."

Cecilia and the rest answered in the same strain, while Julia went on to say various sharp things about the Leslies, though somewhat baffled by her inability to provoke a reply. Presently some one called out:

“Take care! Let her go, girls; here comes the Dragon!”

Miss Almira, nicknamed the Dragon, was a rather important personage who for years had occupied the arduous position of housekeeper and factotum at Mount Cedar, teaching some elementary English branches, sitting in school-room or dormitory to maintain order, keeping accounts, and looked upon by Mrs. Hill as her right hand until Miss Clive, with her more refined and cultivated, though not more energetic and conscientious, nature, had come to rival her in authority. Miss Almira, who was much the elder, had resisted these attempts to divide her sway, but in vain; and the result was a sort of hollow truce between them, often passing into sharp words. The balance of power in all pertaining to the schoolroom naturally inclined in Miss Clive's favor, as nearly all the girls took pains to cultivate her good graces; while the poor Dragon, equally good and earnest, with more plain common sense in many things, and never harsh save from necessity, became an object of dislike and dread.

Verena, knowing herself powerless to rescue

Kate, had run to seek her friends, Agnes Leslie or Grace Howard, but unexpectedly met Miss Almira in the garden, and appealed to her.

“Seventeen years old, and disgracing themselves by tormenting Kate, are they?” wearily sighed the poor Dragon, facing the unwelcome prospect of passing her fragment of noonday leisure in bestowing a rebuke. “You did right to tell me, dear, but you had better keep out of the way, and let them fancy I come by accident, or they will persecute you afterwards.”

Cecilia, catching sight of the teacher, thrust Kate off her lap with a jerk, while Julia flung the locket on the table, whence it was quickly snatched by its owner as she darted off and ran to where Verena awaited her beyond the spreading cedars, sinking on a bench and bursting into a flood of tears.

“Never mind!” she sobbed in answer to her friend’s efforts to console her. “I’ll be better soon. Only—I wish there were more girls here like you, and Cornie, and Grace, and—oh, I do get so tired of being forced to bear horrid things and pretending not to mind!”

Verena laughed and nodded, twirling round in a piröuette on tiptoe and spreading out her arms with a quick, graceful gesture, while she tossed her handsome head until its jet-black locks seemed to sparkle in the sunshine with a luminous shimmer reminding Kate of the

silvery luster visible at noon upon the polished needles of a pine. Grace Howard, a tall brunette of eighteen, meeting them as they turned towards the house, and, seeing the locket in Kate's hand, stopped her, exclaiming:

“Why don't you wear that oftener? The girls would grow accustomed to seeing it, and, as for all that stuff about calling it your ‘amulet,’ you should turn the tables on them by making it serve as an amulet, to remind you of things and persons that you oughtn't to forget.”

Kate's eyes again filled as she silently handed the locket to Grace, who lifted her light, flowing hair, and, clasping the chain round her neck, kissed her and hastened away. There was no time for talking; the bell rang, and they had to return to the schoolroom, becoming aware of a certain subdued whispering among their classmates.

“Didn't you hear?” began Cornie. “Something is up. All our commanders have held a council in the study, and Foxey heard the General say, as she came out, ‘Then it is settled, each shall read her own——’”

“Compositions, of course!” broke in Fanny. “We are each to stand up on the platform and spout our own eloquence, instead of the General doing it for us. No wonder her lungs have given out under the strain of your last

four-paged production, Kate, my dear; so here's the result——”

Fanny's teasing was cut short by the entrance of Mrs. Hill, always present during the reading of compositions, followed by Miss Clive.

That young woman was full of fancies. In these days she would probably have found vent for what Kate called her “church, stage and army craze” by forming branches of the King's Daughters, the Bands of Mercy and similar associations among her pupils, which, if judiciously managed, might have done them a world of good. But, at that time, such things were as yet unheard of, and the “General” amused herself by tinkering at many matters in the line of study, especially the classes for recitation and composition, once a fortnight, with which Mrs. Hill never presumed to interfere. Kate was fond of writing, and generally maintained her high place in that class without much trouble. Yet her heart beat at Fanny's words.

Much as she enjoyed composition days, it was always something of a trial to her to hear her own themes read aloud. Miss Clive, in her desire to stimulate ambition, usually assembled the elder girls to hear the productions of Kate's class, and she shivered before the presence of her sister Elisabeth, who, though a fine student, was a most labored and Johnsonian writer, with a fondness for criticising quite in proportion

to her own inability to compose. The pain would not be unmixed with pleasure, but Kate felt as if the floor must open to engulf her before she could muster courage to mount the platform and read out her own composition before all those girls. And what would Verena do? Personal fascination and dramatic power would be sure to carry her through whatever she might write, and—who could tell?—perhaps she might even become head of the class—and a rush of bitter, envious fears for the loss of her most cherished distinction overflowed Kate's heart.

Mrs. Hill had taken her chair; her sad, dark eyes resting mournfully upon the rows of young faces, her own face marked with many lines of ill health, anxiety and care. Beside her stood Miss Clive, tall, erect, dignified, one hand lying on the desk, the other holding a written paper as, with her spirited head thrown back and her piercing gaze taking in every girl in the room, she read, in a strong, rich voice, her new edict that all compositions must be read by their authors henceforth.

Prepared as many were for this, a low murmur of dismay ran through the ranks of Kate's class, selected as the first victims of the new law in all its rigor. Verena, quite unconcerned, glanced at Kate, and saw her flush and draw a deep breath.

It may have been a sign of the struggle which Miss Clive, in many ways, tried to keep up against her own impetuosity, that her wildest actions were marked by some show of form and ceremony. A certain spirit of military discipline blended strangely with each fantastic impulse. One of her habits was that of never addressing any girl by an abbreviation, but of rolling out her Christian name and surname whenever she summoned her. Accordingly, after a pause, she began:

“Katharine Gordon Armstrong!”

No answer; but Kate looked up in speechless tremor, while her heart beat to suffocation. Another, and still louder, quicker summons. She rose with difficulty, determined not to amuse her critics by displaying nervousness, yet trembling in every limb and leaning upon her desk.

“Katharine Gordon Armstrong!” cried Miss Clive yet more sharply, contracting her fine black eyebrows, tapping her pencil impatiently upon the desk and her foot upon the floor.

Kate’s limbs at last consented to bear her, not too steadily, out from among the desks, along the room and up the steps.

Miss Clive greeted her with an angry glance.

“Stand here!” she began, taking Kate’s trembling arm and pushing her into a prominent position beside the desk, at which she

now seated herself. "Let us have no more nonsense! Begin at once!"

Kate's terror, of course, was the one absorbing interest of the school just now. Whether from malice, curiosity or sympathy, each girl bent her eyes steadily upon the shrinking figure that looked like the youngest of them all, feeling as if her own destiny might be guessed by what happened to Kate. Frightened though they were, the pervading excitement vented itself in a low murmur.

"Silence!" thundered Miss Clive. "I am addressing all of you. It is time for this nonsense to have an end. No sensible girl, who has done her best, need be ashamed to read it out. Katharine, begin at once."

Kate's cold, trembling hands could scarcely open her composition book, and her voice, as she read the title, was so husky that Miss Clive repeated it aloud. It was well that she knew the opening lines by heart, for her brain was dizzy with a wild ringing in her ears; a thick, white, blinding mist hovered before her eyes; she could not see Fanny's piercing gaze or Cornie's look of sympathy. Her faltering voice would not be controlled; twice she stammered and was silent. Unable to steady it, she pressed one hand upon her chest, and the touch of the locket beneath her trembling fingers helped to recall her scattered thoughts. By degrees her

voice grew steadier, then full and natural, as her innate love for anything dramatic came to her assistance, giving her courage to go on boldly through certain rather high-flown passages which she would gladly have omitted but for the presence, at her elbow, of Miss Clive, who liked fine writing, fine names (her own was Adelaide Helen), and had not always sufficient sense of humor to discern when the sublime, as existing in the schoolgirl mind, was apt to topple over into the ridiculous. In a few moments Kate began to feel as though acting in a play; there was a keen enjoyment in this when the awful plunge was over. Terror had ruled the beginning of her stay upon the platform, but a flush of gratified ambition absorbed her at its close when Miss Clive, in her usual dictatorial, stately manner, uttered warm words of praise, in which Miss Hill most heartily joined.

Kate's eyes were sparkling and her head uplifted as she marched back to her seat. There was no fear of Fanny's teasing, for "Frances Edith Fox" was the next victim, getting through her somewhat brief but pithy composition as if she rather thought the whole affair a joke. Several senior members of the class followed, after which the "Thistles" reappeared in Grace Howard's sister Sophie, a strong, blithe, careless creature of fifteen, who,

though not physically nervous, was chidden by Miss Clive for "want of dignity." Verena, as a new scholar, was the last.

As the small, graceful, foreign-looking girl left her seat and, without the least sign of fear, walked up to the platform, Kate, leaning back, almost faint with the reaction from her recent ordeal, felt a secret pang of jealous dread. "Verena has her beauty, and her voice, and her foreign ways that everyone admires—and I have nothing except what I work so hard to get!" thought the poor child, "and I can't be like the good girls in stories and love Verena better than myself, and feel willing to see her take the head of my classes and rob me of all I have earned." Higher ambitions could not have racked a human heart more intensely than did this small one of hers during the next few moments, thankful that the girls were so absorbed in watching Verena that they did not notice Kate's agitated looks. Brief, though well expressed, save for one or two rather flowery, foreign-sounding phrases, the Hungarian's production, recited with her usual dramatic ardor, was received with but moderate praise by her teachers, who, like the girls, seemed less struck by what she had said than by the way she said it. Kate breathed again and lifted her head as Miss Clive read out the names, her own still the first, and quietly slipped the

red ribbon of her medal as head of the composition class through her buttonhole, where it greeted Verena's eyes as she calmly returned to her seat.

Provoked by the recent exhibition of giggling nervousness, Miss Clive, while the girls awaited the word of dismissal, suddenly rose and stood in her favorite attitude of martial dignity—head thrown back, the left hand drooping on the desk, while, with her right outstretched, she began an oration upon what she termed her pupils' folly, dwelling, not without some eloquence, upon the duty of developing all talents to the utmost, and finally, with great enthusiasm, reciting Milton's sonnet on arriving at the age of twenty-three. A few girls looked interested, but the majority, only too well accustomed to their teacher's freaks and inconsistencies, listened impatiently, longing to get out of doors.

"The General is crazy about Milton," said Fanny to Verena as they ran into the garden. "Once she gave Kate a dozen of his sonnets to learn as a punishment, but Kate was in her element, knew them all in an hour, and rolled them off in her most solemn style. So now the General gives her arithmetic, or chemistry, or something dry, and dull, and hard, that she can't work up into an effect of any sort. Hard work, without any poetry to be got out of it, is

just what Kate detests most—and so, my dear young Hungarian, I wickedly incline to think it is with you.”

“How did you guess?” cried Verena, much amused, as she lightly leaped upon the seat of the large swing, prepared to “work up,” with several other Thistles, all of whom regarded her with admiring eyes as she stood poised upon the edge as though ready to take flight, her long hair floating in the warm breeze, her eyes sparkling, her whole weight supported by her little hands clasped round the poles as she bent backwards. “At my Hungarian school they told me so.”

“I always sinned by seeing things too clearly and speaking out,” “Foxey” answered drily. “Kate says it’s my hard-headed Yankee style, though she’s half a New Englander herself and vows I haven’t any poetry in me because I don’t fly off into heroics as she does. I only hope she may develop a little more hard-headedness and less poetry in a year or two; it would do her a world of good. But I really pitied her at first, on the platform, though she got through splendidly, and the flush and excitement were very becoming. I don’t admire those pale, washed-out blondes much (Fanny herself was a rich brunette, quite aware of her attractions), but she looked better than Sophie Howard, who stooped and giggled, and showed for less than

she is. Look—Kate is off, enjoying her triumph among her small friends yonder!”

Somewhat afraid of “Foxey’s” sharp speeches, Kate had sought refuge with a congenial batch of junior Thistles, where she felt secure, while they raced up and down. Grace Howard, meanwhile, walked apart with a tall, thoughtful-looking girl, whose dark brown eyes shone with deep interest as she listened to Grace’s story of her meeting with Kate after the adventure with the teasing Julia & Co. The “banished guardian angel,” as Fanny called Agnes Leslie, was troubling herself already concerning what she feared might be Kate’s future wildness under the fascination of Verena’s influence, hardly allowing the more sanguine and level-headed Grace to take a brighter view, and mournfully recalling how she once had said that Kate’s besetting sin was the giving too free a rein to her wild imagination and passionate love for the beautiful with a zest she seldom showed for spiritual things, and an ardent worship of the ideal and the fanciful which dazzled her and might but lead astray.

CHAPTER IV.

MARCHING ALONG.

“**V**ORWÄRTS!—forwair-r-r-ds, my Fräuleins!” exclaimed the strong, good-natured voice of Frau Schulze as she marshaled the scholars in the gymnasium, two by two, one May afternoon. She was a spare, active, pleasant, indefatigable German woman from a town some miles off, where her husband, an elderly Herr Professor, kept a flourishing seminary for boys, who came twice a week to Mount Cedar, teaching German before dinner and gymnastics afterwards. “To ze right—*Vorwärts!*—so!”

Eighty girls, in their loose, simple school uniform were marching, step by step, to the martial air that Madame Verrier was playing on the piano, and Miss Clive, her long, dark, half nun-like and half scholastic dress that she affected in the schoolroom exchanged for one suited to gymnastics, walked like a commanding officer by Frau Schulze’s side. Mrs. Hill was upstairs with one of her frequent attacks of sick headache, but her niece, Dorinda Davis, a small, slight, pale, timid young person of

twenty-two, whom the girls called "poor Dorinda" and "the Mouse," and was always nervous, and was kept by her aunt as a teacher out of charity, brought up the rear.

Frau Schulze is a plain, unromantic figure, but the train she leads is an attractive one. All those young heads, with rich, flowing locks (one of Miss Clive's regulations decreed that each girl must wear her hair turned back, in the style once known as "*à la Chinoise*," with a round comb, and hanging down either loose or in a braid upon her shoulders), those red cheeks and slender forms moving in rhythmic measure, are a sight worth seeing as they troop along the wide gymnasium like soldiers, or, breaking into single file and "double quick," run in and out between poles and bars on either side, or, forming into long lines, advance in one broad phalanx up the room, dividing into ranks of two and returning to begin again. Ranged according to size, not age, the train was headed by Verena and Kate, smallest, though not youngest, of the scholars, keenly enjoying what to them was an imaginative delight which would hardly have been prized in like measure by their schoolmates, who nearly all marched along in a very business-like sort of way, without appearing in the least excited by the motions or the music. Conversation, of course, was not encouraged, but a good deal of talk in low tones went on.

“Kate!” Verena whispered eagerly, with a quick, flashing glance from her dark-gray eyes, “doesn’t this marching to music make you think of something wild and poetic, I can’t tell exactly what—but it all seems to symbolize something. I feel like a young soldier going on to battle through a wide, strange country, or as if I were one of Garibaldi’s Thousand of Marsala—or else a Hungarian going to fight the Austrians as my mother’s father did in ’49, though I wouldn’t say it to anyone but you.”

Kate tightened her hold of Verena’s hand as, at a certain signal, each couple raised their joined hands above their heads.

“Feel it? I felt it when I first marched here, five years ago! It makes me think of wild, beautiful allegories like ‘The Vast Army’ and Hans Andersen’s stories, and then, as Mrs. Hemans says, ‘I dream of all things free’—till I long to burst out singing—and to cry, too.” Kate’s imperfect efforts to express her fancies came to a sudden end as Frau Schulze ordered the ranks to open and march in single file round opposite sides of the room.

Verena nodded a joyful assent to her friend’s dreamings, and, full of her own visions, marched away at the head of her long column, perfectly happy for the moment, able to revel in keen bodily exercise and to cast off her frequent melancholy as she led her troop close behind

Frau Schulze to meet Kate, with her train, following Miss Clive at the farther end of the room, when, reuniting, they ran, two by two, along the whole length of the gymnasium, and halted before the high window looking towards the west.

The sky was covered by the leaden clouds of an approaching storm. Verena availed herself of the pause between two exercises to climb up to a perch upon the horizontal bars, where she could sit and look out through the open upper half of the window into those dark gray masses scudding before the wind that whirled aloft great wreaths of dust and bent the branches of the maples till they showed the white undersides of their fresh young leaves. She would have liked to rush out into the garden to watch the lurid sky, but had to content herself with alternately looking out of the window and down upon the troop of girls, many of whom pressed together as if for mutual protection, uttering little screams whenever there came a flash of lightning or the thunder growled.

“Silly geese! Just pure affectation, half of it!” exclaimed a clear, determined voice; and Verena, starting, beheld the small, nimble form of Fanny Fox perched among the bars at her side. Though greatly admiring the Hungarian, and admired in turn, somewhat to Kate’s secret

annoyance, she was not altogether a welcome visitor at this moment to her new classmate, who much preferred to enjoy her dreams and her view of the storm clouds undisturbed, but strove hard, and with success, to look gay and careless as Fanny continued:

“They do it for effect, because they fancy it’s fine to be afraid of lightning. Julia there, with all her faults, isn’t cowardly—quite the opposite—but she likes to plague the little ones into believing there’s something to be scared at. Look, how she squeals and hides her eyes at every flash! Poor Dorinda is really nervous, but she does her best to hide it—and Kate enjoys the commotion. See how Queen Bess shakes her by the shoulder and scolds; but Kate doesn’t mind, she’s off with Brownie, and those youngsters who admire her.” Fanny rattled off a string of similar comments upon her schoolmates, interspersed with compliments on her skill as a gymnast and freedom from fear of thunderstorms, to Verena, who sat, meanwhile, with her eyes fixed upon the wild gray sky, longing to be alone, or anywhere undisturbed by small talk, wondering silently at the difference between herself and Fanny, whose only impression from all the grand tumult of nature seemed to be amusement at the commotion it caused among the girls. But she knew enough of school policy to hide her weariness of Fanny’s

chatter, and kept answering with her thoughts far away, unwilling to repel the advances of her lively companion, who, as usual, showed great readiness to initiate her into all the gossip current among the pupils.

“Fräulein Forster! My little Magyar maiden, where art thou?” cried Frau Schulze suddenly, in German, looking round for Verena, who, as half foreign, and chattering *Deutsch* quite as readily as her native Hungarian, was, like Kate, an especial favorite with the enthusiastic teacher of the German tongue. A few rapid sentences in that language, and the repeated sound of her own name, roused Verena from her dreams to the sight of her comrades ranged in orderly ranks at one end of the room, while Frau Schulze, her round, motherly face flushed with heat and excitement, stood with outspread arms, in the middle of the floor, looking up at her.

“A thunderstorm is drawing near,” went on the Frau, in German, extending her hands toward the lurid skies. “Yes, that is glorious—and thou, little dreamer from a foreign land, thou lovest to gaze into the great storm clouds. I love it, too; but the hour flies so swiftly by. What should I do if all thy fellow-pupils were poet souls, like thee and thy friend with the golden locks. Come down again, beloved child!”

Fanny saw only the comic side, the amused faces of her comrades at Frau Schulze's somewhat grotesque appearance, and, suppressing a smile, slid quietly down to the floor. Verena, of course, enjoyed the kind soul's enthusiasm, glad to feel that some one besides Kate could understand why she loved to watch the storm, now dashing in wild showers against the closed windows. With a quick reply in German, which, therefore, ran less risk of being laughed at, Verena slipped lightly from her perch to join Kate in the next exercise of swinging along the whole length of the gymnasium on the rings, keenly enjoying the praises won by their agility.

The other girls followed in turn, while the Frau, economical of time, sent those who had finished to practice with wands under Miss Clive. Kate, Verena and Brownie, meanwhile, had contrived to betake themselves to the springing-board, indulging in sundry feats of their own invention. Brownie, neglecting Kate's injunction to "take hold of hands," soon found herself flying out through the air, and alighting almost on the shoulders of Marion Boyd, a gentle girl of eleven, who had not been long at school, and whom Brownie liked to befriend when homesick or sad. Marion was standing in the back row of the wand exercisers, holding her long, polished

staff with extended arms above her head, when, with a cry of warning that came too late, Brownie fell against her from behind, knocking the wand from her grasp and rolling with her upon the floor. Frightened rather than hurt, the two children were too giddy and startled to rise immediately, and an eager crowd gathered round them, while Frau Schulze, full of sympathy, and Miss Clive, loudly talking and reproving, hurried to the spot.

“Look at Verena!” suddenly exclaimed Grace Howard, and Frau Schulze, glancing upwards, uttered a cry of astonishment, while the rest, to their surprise and dread, beheld the small, slender figure tossing wildly far above among ropes, sliding bars and ladders which filled the center of the ceiling directly under the skylight, performing, with apparent ease and evident enjoyment, a variety of impromptu feats at a perilous height above the floor.

“She must have climbed there while Miss Clive was speaking,” murmured Agnes in dismay. “Oh, what will that Hungarian child do next?”

“The general sentiment of our school, my dear,” said Fanny. “Verena is the best excitement we have ever had yet; so don’t preach at her.”

Kate’s bright blue eyes as she gazed aloft sparkled with admiration of her friend’s

prowess and great longing to do likewise. Seized by a sudden wish for a nearer view of the grand storm clouds, Verena had fearlessly mounted, with her usual agility, to the region of the skylight, against which the rain beat down with all its fury. Had no one noticed her she would have stayed there, silently working off her own exultant pleasure in the storm by rapid motion; but having once become an object of most anxious interest to all present, it was not in schoolgirl nature in general, or in her own, to forego prolonging the sensation she had caused.

“How dreadful; how will she ever get down; how terribly near she seems to those flashes of lightning!” were the awe-stricken comments of the others; while Miss Clive, to the general surprise, instead of beginning a rebuke, turned away and marched silently out of the room.

“Now for fun,” whispered Fanny to Grace, “when the General says not a word, but frowns, and stalks off like the Tragic Muse, you may know that a greater storm than this is brewing.”

“Verena has fascinated even the General up to a certain point,” Grace replied. “She enjoys the foreign element and her delightful, original way of startling everyone; and Frau Schulze adores her next to Kate. Oh, just look at the poor woman, with her arms outstretched

towards her 'liebes Kind,' beseeching her to come down or she will break her heart! I should say the 'liebes Kind' ran far more risk of breaking her own neck."

Miss Clive, whose righteous indignation at Verena's foolhardiness was not unmingled with a certain admiration of her daring, had hurried off to lay the case before Mrs. Hill, hoping that the unmanageable girl might be impressed by the show of authority residing in that poor, nervous lady, though it was a show and not much more. Arrived in her chief's room she found the place preoccupied by Miss Almira, come to report some domestic emergency, upon hearing which Miss Clive's thoughts took a new direction, and Verena's misdeeds fell into the background. Meanwhile Frau Schulze, relieved by the departure of the "General," stood holding an excited half-German, half-English parley with Verena, beginning with a rebuke, but gradually passing into irrepressible admiration of her agility, and ending with an eager questioning as to how she had contrived to do it. To all of which the culprit, highly elated, answered merrily from her perch aloft, her head almost touching the skylight, while the girls stood looking up at her. Kate's face betrayed such a wish to imitate her dangerous example that the Frau extracted from her a promise, reluctantly given, but faithfully kept,

of never attempting such foolhardy performances, and, having ordered some older girls to drag out two of the mattresses to the middle of the floor, commanded Verena to descend.

Verena's enjoyment of the scene redoubled while, though obeying, she professed to find difficulty in coming down, keeping her audience in a state of breathless wonder, and gaining time for a variety of perilous-looking twists and turns, often hanging by one hand, and swinging herself to and fro with as much ease and coolness as if she had been just above the floor. Frau Schulze kept up a volley of directions, walking up and down, with outspread arms, beneath her wilful pupil, ready to catch her if she fell. Madame Verrier stood ejaculating, "*O ciel, ma pauvre petite!*" and the girls uttered little squeals of sympathetic terror, while Kate and Brownie hardly breathed until their friend, flushed, panting, but triumphant, landed safely on the floor. Their welcome was cut short by Frau Schulze, who greeted Verena with a tremendous embrace, adjuring her in German never, never to attempt such tricks again.

"But I did not hurt myself—and it was so exciting!" said the culprit, in English, for the benefit of her admiring audience.

The Frau's reply was lost in ardent murmurs in her native tongue, and she would prob-

ably have continued to vent her emotion had not Elisabeth Armstrong, unwilling to lose time, and Julia Maxwell, impatient of the attention excited by "that queer, foreign little mad monkey," simultaneously reminded her that the lesson was not yet over. Verena, dancing with spirits, started from the Frau's encircling arms as she sat on a bench, hugging her over and over again, and ran to take her place in the ranks beside Kate.

Again the girls formed into line for the final march. The storm was dying away into the distance, the windows were opened and a fresh breeze blew up from the blossoming garden. The western sky was growing clear. Madame Verrier seated herself at the piano and struck up Garibaldi's Hymn, at the urgent entreaty of Kate, who felt as if she would gladly have sung it, to work off her excitement. Flushed and radiant, so that she looked pretty, even by Verena's side, and by contrast, she marched on, full of innocent, ideal happiness, her blue eyes sparkling, her ever-active imagination gathering from the most ordinary things a wealth of romance and poetry. It was not the mere love for theatrical display (as she, long after, tried to describe it to a friend), but a strangely mingled feeling of passionate love for the beautiful in itself, and an irrepressible desire to make a part of anything dramatic or

artistic that might be going on. Everything, as she had said to Verena—the marching, the sunset light, the music—seemed to suggest something grand or wonderful, such as she had read or dreamed about; she felt as if she owned one more sense than the rest of her companions, and could catch poetic glimpses of some brighter, fairer world.

“Kate, you’re in the clouds yet, looking at the sky and beating time with your foot,” began Fanny, as usual, when, the lesson over and Frau Schulze gone, a small knot of girls lingered in the gymnasium. “Planning your future career, I suppose—have you settled your wedding?”

“Nonsense!” indignantly cried Kate, and, as though to get farther out of “Foxey’s” reach, she mounted higher on the range of horizontal bars where they were perched, in front of the western window.

“Weddings aren’t much in your line, then,” Fanny went on, with a sly wink at her laughing companions. “I have it—Kate is going to be a doctress, or a lady lawyer, or a ‘clergy-woman’ (here Cornie shook with mirth), or a professoress, or”—— Kate, dashed down from her happy dreams, grew redder still, murmuring some indistinct reply.

“A lecturer—no, an authoress,” quietly added Fanny, her keen, dark eyes glancing up

into Kate's blue ones, which for the moment were wet with tears, partly of vexation and partly from a jumble of feelings not even clear to herself. "Or, perhaps, a poetess—how would that do?"

Kate's features were distorted by a nervous laugh, while she writhed still farther along the smooth bar, away from the others, answering with a string of desperate nonsense to the unmerciful raillery which was now let loose.

"You, Verena," went on Fanny, finally ceasing to torment Kate, "are set down for an artist, of course—or a singer—or an actress, and a reciter of dramatic poetry, or all put together, for you could do it."

Fanny's tone became earnest. Verena's face kindled. The rest looked up at her with admiring interest as she suddenly rose and remained standing lightly poised upon the bar, both arms outspread and clinging to another bar above, her finely curved lips (what Frau Schulze called the "artist mouth") just parted, her dark-gray eyes, so deeply shaded by their brows and lashes, and with such large, dilated pupils that they nearly always seemed black, gazing with a rapt expression far away into the bright sunset sky. She looked like the embodiment of some young genius suddenly awakening to the call to a high destiny, to Kate, who had listened to the roll of Verena's gifts with a

rush of passionate longing and guileless envy, mingled with relief because the one career which teasing Fanny had seriously alluded to for Kate herself had not been prophesied by her for Verena also.

It was fortunate for Kate, and her teachers likewise, that nothing had occurred to develop her latent capacity for jealousy in any of the studies wherein she really labored to excel. Verena, though a fair scholar, did not at all contest the headship of the class in any English branches, while her proficiency in languages was what might be expected from her foreign schooling and Hungarian blood. Drawing and music, for neither of which Kate showed much talent, were Verena's forte, and she had soon been promoted to an important place in the evening choir by Madame Verrier, delighted with her new pupil's full contralto voice. It was only in bodily exercises, dancing and gymnastics that these two most prickly Thistles of Mount Cedar seemed really on a level with each other. Yet, oh!—to possess some bright outward gift, inseparably interwoven with her own personality, Kate thought, as she heard Verena marked out as able, if she chose, to win success in all the things, save one, which she herself all her life had longed for—and with this silent envy came a wild thrill of joy and power and exultation in the gift of expression that was

hers; a sense of utter yearning and dejection on the one hand, and a fullness of expanding life and richness on the other. The rush of mingled joy and pain was so strong that it was a relief when Cornie began talking nonsense, Verena, to their surprise, having shown no inclination to pursue the topic of her future; and Fanny's attention soon returned to her gymnastic exploits.

"She *was* brave to keep climbing up there like a sailor boy, with the lightning flashing in her eyes," said Cornie.

"She made me think of Ariel," put in Kate.

"Now, Kate!" laughed Fanny, "don't you know yet how superfluous it is to waste your Shakespearian allusions on our Cornelia, who isn't likely to resemble her antique namesake, for she can't remember the difference between 'Hail, holy Light,' that the General is forever setting us to spout, and 'Lead, kindly Light,' which we sing so often; and I'm sure she'll take years to clear up her terrible confusion between those three distinguished worthies, Thomas à-Kempis, Thomas Aquinas and Thomas à-Becket."

Cornie's imperturbable good humor enabled her to join in the laugh against her with a happy serenity which surprised even Brownie and made Kate sigh to be as comfortably pachydermatous as her old friend, who, as the

merriment subsided, burst out singing in the clear mezzo-soprano voice that was her one great gift and which Kate not untruly suspected her of wishing to display just now as an offset to Fanny's sauciness, with the words of a song that Miss Clive had, not altogether skillfully, adapted from a well-known war poem, altering, omitting and rewriting to suit her capricious fancy, and setting it to the tune of Garibaldi's hymn, "To Arms."

"Marching along, in the morn's early glow,
On to the battlefield, brothers, we go!"

Kate, thrilled by the first notes of what Frau Schulze called that "sunny music," less like a battle-cry than a song of rejoicing, slid down and rejoined the group. Cornie sang on, the rest chiming in chorus:

"Marching along, we are marching along!

Gird on the armor, and be marching along!"

"But, girls," began Brownie, "it shouldn't be 'brothers' for us."

"Dear child, you don't understand," cried Kate. "If it said 'sisters,' there wouldn't be any poetry. Can't you see that all the stir and the fire of it is in the idea of our being soldiers? 'Sisters' seems only to suggest something dreary and dull"——

"Yes," broke in Fanny, "we know you have dismal associations with that word."

"I mean," Kate went on, too excited to heed

the interruption, "that when we say 'brothers' it seems to send a thrill through us, as if we might look forward to a future. But those verses are too tame. They should say more about the young soldiers—like those in 'The Vast Army,' Brownie, you understand that—marching on, side by side, with their banners flying in the morning sunlight, and the sound of their music rolling over the hills. Oh! it should be like the blast of a trumpet"——

"You had better rewrite it for us," said Fanny; while Cornie again burst out singing, and Kate, filled with feelings that made her restless, climbed back to where Verena, singing, yet looking strangely sad, stood with her eyes fixed upon the glowing sky. Clear golden light streamed from the west; the grass and trees shone with glittering raindrops. A fresh evening breeze blew sweet scents through the open windows and brought a soft rustle of full-leaved maples to mingle with the music.

" 'We are living, we are dwelling
In a grand and awful time,
In an age on ages telling;
To be living is sublime!' "

sang Cornie, pealing out the opening lines of "Watchwords" until the gymnasium echoed with the rich fullness of her single voice before it was joined by the others:

" 'To be living is sublime!' "

What did that soldierly summons mean for them, Kate wondered. Cornie sang on for the mere pleasure of singing; sentiment was apt to be lost on her. And yet, with her strength and beauty, her sound nerves and healthy nature, where practical abilities and a calm, life-enjoying temperament went far to compensate for the lack of intellectuality, she was well equipped for life's battle. More of constant, steady happiness and of usefulness might be prophesied for her than would be likely to fall to the lot of Verena and Kate, with their innate sensitiveness, excitability and morbid tendency to brood over the darker side, joined to the artist-nature's endless susceptibility to pain.

Verena had crouched down upon the high bar, her drooping head supported by one listless hand. All the recent fire and exaltation had died out of her face, now overspread by a deep shade of apparently causeless melancholy. Kate looked thrice as happy just then as, humming to herself, she slid down and, catching a ring, whirled herself in wild gyrations round and round.

The others, talking and laughing, did not hear the door open; but Verena, glancing back, beheld Kate lifted bodily down from the ring by Agnes Leslie, who appeared to be striving to keep her from flying into a passion with Elisa-

beth, who, passing the gymnasium, had entered with a grim determination to put a stop to the noise. Agnes, following in the hope of preventing a quarrel, found her efforts in vain. Elisabeth's rebuke was met by a half-jesting, half-angry protest from the girls as, rising in a body, they rushed forward, rescued Kate by force from Agnes' friendly grasp, and treated "Queen Bess" to a few plain home truths regarding her fondness for meddling and playing the amateur governess. In vain she scolded, and Agnes implored quiet; the wild troop, headed by Verena, drowned the voices of their mentors by their own mocking chorus, and, after capering madly round them, dashed past them down the stairs and out of doors.

"They are wilder than ever this evening!" sighed Agnes, sinking down on a mattress as if exhausted. "And, of course, it is all Verena's doing!"

"She is a dreadful, thoughtless, reckless girl!" Elisabeth exclaimed vehemently, "and the worst example for Kate. She is too childish. She needs some steady companion who despises silly tricks, and would encourage her to care more about her studies and cultivating her mind."

"Miss Clive told Kate yesterday that her mind was uncommonly well cultivated for her age," said Agnes, "but the praise seemed to upset her."

Elisabeth's grave face relaxed somewhat; but she still felt and looked distressed about her sister, whom she really cared for more than the girls believed; while the young madcap, meanwhile, was racing up and down the flag-paved walks, animating Verena and the other Thistles to all sorts of wild games, and uplifting her high, eager voice into the red twilight air with:

“Marching along! we are marching along!”

CHAPTER V.

A BAD SATURDAY.

“**A**GNES! Do ask Miss Almira to take us out. She’s going on an errand, and it’s Saturday, and this sort of warm, lazy May morning makes me frantic to get away from the school noise,” pleaded Kate, flinging her arms round her tall friend as they stood in the garden, resounding with the merry clatter of girls enjoying their weekly holiday. “I haven’t courage to ask her, and Brownie won’t, and Cornie and Verena daren’t, because they got into hot water yesterday. Only—don’t let Fanny know, for she would want to join us, and tease, and spoil the freedom of it.”

Agnes demurred at first, but accepted the mission, and in about half an hour the party of six set out. Miss Almira, as she walked on by Agnes’ side through the lovely rolling country, escaping for a while from the depressing influences of her painful position, felt her weary heart grow lighter and soothed by an unwonted sense of freedom and repose; while the four younger girls went tearing on in advance, keep-

ing out of hearing, and chattering as fast as possible.

“Hurrah!” cried Brownie, “how delightful it is to get out!”

“Isn’t it?” said Cornie, pulling a parcel of lemon candy from her pocket. “Help yourselves, I have plenty more tucked safely away where neither General, Dragon, nor Mouse will ever find it. And I have mint stick, too, but didn’t bring any lest our respected conductress yonder might smell the delicious odor and institute a search at home.”

Laughing and eating, they descended the hill and passed through a grove which completely shut out the view of the school above.

“Oh, this is heavenly!” sighed Kate, “to get really away from noises, and pianos, and be able to enjoy the spirit of the woods!”

“Which we never can when the General takes us,” broke in Cornie, in the pauses of sucking candy. “She gives us no peace, but keeps poking after wretched little leaves, and pebbles, and horrid specimens of botany and geology, and wonders that we all don’t want to do it.”

“Yes,” said Kate, indignantly, “she thinks then of nothing but science, though she’s so fond of poetry. I hate those heavy things, botany, and chemistry, and so forth; they were the plague of my life almost as soon as I knew

how to read; so I detest them, and want something fanciful, with poetry in it, Verena, as you do. But I have my own ideal world, where nobody can interfere with me, like 'Tom o' Bedlam,' in that song:

“ ‘With a host of furious fancies
Whereof I am commander;
With a burning spear, and a horse of air
Through the wilderness I wander,’ ”——

Miss Almira, catching the uncanny rhymes, ordered Kate to stop singing such nonsense, and she had to obey, growling to Verena that she always was sure to get taken down just whenever she was worked up to anything delightful; while the Hungarian consoled her by promising to teach her some of Petöfi's war songs in the original Magyar, which even the Dragon would be forced to respect as a foreign tongue intended for general improvement. Having performed their errand, the party stopped to rest on a rising ground known as Martin's Hill, its shady summit being crowned by a small school-house which to-day, of course, was closed.

Agnes and her teacher sat down on a bench in the playground, while the four girls, eager and untired, began exploring in all directions. Poor Almira, spent with walking, and only too thankful for a brief respite from duty, did not

exercise her usual strict *surveillance* after the first few minutes, but fell into a semi-confidential talk with her sympathizing pupil, who was able to feel for her troubles with rebellious scholars, unruly or inefficient servants, Mrs. Hill's poor health, and Miss Dorinda's languid inertia, with the crowning trial of Miss Clive's overbearing ways and unsparing tongue. Even her own kindly impulses were often ridiculed or stamped upon by Miss Clive, who, if she caught Almira furtively trying to console some homesick pupil, would oppose her, and accuse her of seeking to spoil the child. Only one under-teacher—a Mrs. Brownlow, who had no especial influence—was friendly towards her; for Miss Benson disliked her, and Madame Verrier, though kindly and well bred, was too unaccustomed to talking English for her to converse with Almira, who in turn shrank from airing her rather scanty store of French. But, while she thus expanded toward Agnes, a woe-ful piece of mischief was going on.

Rattling in vain at the locked entrance of the school, the girls had run round to the back end, quite out of Miss Almira's sight, where they discovered a window, whose broken shutters left it unprotected. In a moment four eager hands raised the sash, four pairs of curious eyes peered into the dark interior, four mischief-loving heads were filled with sudden

visions of foolish pranks, while Brownie whispered, "Can't we get in?"

"That's soon done," said Kate, as, with the help of a stone beneath the window, she scrambled up on to the narrow sill and dropped inside. Brownie and the two others followed.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Cornie triumphantly. "There's not much to be seen, though, in this faint light, and we daren't open those front windows or the Dragon will catch us. What a place! Just look at those old hacked, dreary desks and benches! I couldn't study in such a hole."

"You couldn't study very hard anywhere, it's my private opinion," muttered Kate. "Look, here's a horrible old waterproof cloak left hanging in this corner, alongside of a towel. It must belong to the schoolmistress. Oh, Thistles; I'll tell you what we'll do!"

Eagerness for a frolic brought Verena from the blackboard, where she had begun to draw a caricature of Miss Almira, and Brownie from exploring the depths of a pile of old school-books, while Kate hurriedly went on, "We'll dress up a figure of the 'schoolmarm,' and put it in her chair, and she'll find it the first thing when she comes on Monday morning. Give me that old broom, Cornie, there by the chimney; that will make a foundation for the cloak to cover, and we'll put something on her head,

and a spelling book—no, an arithmetic, that's infinitely worse, on the desk before her, and a long switch by her side"—

"And a pipe in her mouth," suggested Verena, producing a broken-stemmed clay pipe, probably used for blowing soap bubbles, which she had found lying in a corner. Brownie stood silently looking on.

"Hurry!" cried Kate, "everyone must help or we won't get through before the Dragon calls us. There, I've got the schoolmarm neatly draped! Get out of that window, Brownie dear, and pick me a nice long switch of some sort; I can't find any rod in here, birching is out of fashion. Why, Brownie, won't you go?"

"But I don't think we have any right to play tricks and turn things upside-down," began Brownie, with some hesitation. "I didn't mind just climbing in; I know I proposed it; but I think we ought to be satisfied with looking round; and I know Agnes would say so, too."

"Nonsense!" replied Kate, whose conscience, however, said just the same thing, only she was determined not to listen to it. "Nobody will be hurt, and we only want a little fun. Well, I must go myself. Twist that towel round the broom end, Cornie, so as to make her a face, and put the tin basin on, Verena, upside-down, over that."

"I can make her a better face," said Verena,

snatching a sheet of paper from the desk and proceeding to draw a pen-and-ink set of gruesome features. "I wish I knew the schoolmarm's style, to hit off her looks."

"She's a sharp-cut Yankee," said Cornie, choking with mirth as she watched Verena dash off her sketch, encircled by Medusa-like locks. "Oh, yes; that's very like her! How splendidly you draw!" Brownie forgot her scruples and laughed heartily as Verena pinned the paper face in front of the broom head, sticking the pipe through a hole in the lips. Kate returned with a long switch of maple, stripped of its leaves, and propped it close to the schoolmarm's side. Even Brownie caught the full infection of mischief, and hunted out the worst of the torn old arithmetic books to spread open before her. Gum shoes, of doubtful age and huge proportions, were during this search discovered, and instantly seized upon to serve as feet protruding from beneath the cloak. Hands were supplied by a pair of ragged woolen mittens which Verena extracted from a desk. Kate twisted up an old newspaper, which had evidently contained somebody's lunch, into a fool's cap wherewith to crown the already towering head. Verena rushed again to the blackboard and drew caricatures of all her teachers, while Kate improved upon her friend's sketch of Miss Almira by scrawling and singing:

“ ‘Hence, ye horrors of Subtraction!
Hence, ye demons of distraction,
Proper and Improper Fraction!
Woe to him whose weary mission
Was inventing Long Addition!
Decimals, your endless number
Haunts my weary brain in slumber!
Roots (of dentist’s chair suggestive)
To extract ye makes me restive’ ”——

Here Brownie burst out with such a peal of laughter that Kate stopped, afraid of being heard by the two unsuspecting guardians outside.

“We must go,” she exclaimed reluctantly. “Well, we’ve produced something worth seeing in the Guy Fawkes line! What would the Saints of our class think of us?”

“They won’t be asked their opinion,” said Cornie, looking round to see if there remained any other way of adorning the effigy. “Just think, girls, what a sensation there’ll be on Monday morning when the schoolmarm arrives and finds her double seated in the chair! What wouldn’t I give to see the fun. I shall be all the time thinking of it!”

“So shall I; but, for pity’s sake, have the sense to keep quiet, and don’t begin nudging me, and whispering about it till the General catches us,” broke in Kate, who, with Verena, was busily scrawling certain observations sup-

posed to proceed from the schoolmarm's mouth.

"We're taking a left-handed revenge on the whole race of teachers," laughed the Hungarian. "My mind feels quite relieved now from that scowl the General gave me yesterday when I blundered about acids and alkalies. Cornie, don't betray us by dropping your handkerchief with your name on it. Hark! Run! Agnes is calling us!"

Miss Almira, suddenly roused from her peaceful talk by remarking the absence of her younger charges, had sent Agnes to look for them at the back of the school, while she herself went searching in another direction. Luckily for the conspirators, Agnes' call, as she left her seat, gave them just time to scramble out of the window and meet her by the side of the building with as innocent faces as they could muster.

Kate was flushed and talking volubly. Verena looked wilder, more foreign and defiant than ever, while Cornie's handsome features wore an expression of *insouciance* so evidently assumed that Agnes, suspecting mischief, but unwilling to ask questions, contented herself with joining Brownie, who had lingered behind to shut the window. Miss Almira's questions upon seeing them were carelessly answered by Cornie and Kate to the effect that they had

been "looking about them," and Kate exerted herself to divert the current of her teacher's thoughts by instantly engaging her in conversation upon sundry topics wherein Agnes well knew that her young friend took no interest. Almira, poor weary soul, was not just then in her usual inquisitorial mood, but Agnes noted all, and, even without the rest, little Brownie's ill-concealed uneasiness would have struck her. Late in the afternoon, happening to meet Agnes alone in the garden, poor Brownie, yielding to a sudden impulse to ease her burdened conscience, flung her arms round her, and detained her with a quick confession, many words of ardent self-reproach, and wild petitions not to tell the authorities, and bring trouble upon the others.

Agnes, greatly worried, sought to soothe the child, but seized the first opportunity of speaking to Kate, Verena and Cornie in private, to acquaint them with Brownie's confession, which the latter seemed to fear must render them her enemies henceforth. The three culprits, though somewhat dismayed, listened without much emotion until Agnes, wrought up into over-scrupulous zeal, came to the point of her address, which was that their absurd mischief must be undone, the "schoolmarm" demolished and things restored to their normal condition in the school-house before Monday morning,

or else much trouble between the schoolmistress and her scholars, some of whom she would accuse of the trick, would be the result.

“Oh, but Agnes, you don’t mean it?” implored Kate. “We can’t go there now, in the twilight—and you’ve no idea how delightfully grewsome the schoolmarm looks, sitting there in state, in the rusty old waterproof, and a switch five feet long, and a fool’s cap on her head, and a horrid, short pipe sticking out of her mouth.”

Agnes, Mentor though she was, could not repress a smile.

“And, besides,” Kate went on, “no one will ever suspect the country children, for they couldn’t possibly have written all the things we did on the blackboard, and not one of them could have drawn such a capital face as Verena did without the slightest trouble.”

Agnes smiled anew, but declared it made matters worse, for the writings and the drawings might be traced to their authors. Verena was loud in her indignation at what she termed Brownie’s treachery, wishing that the child might never be allowed to join in their sports again; to all of which Agnes, eager to withdraw her from such wild company, could have said “Amen.” Cornie, though vexed at what she thought Brownie’s foolishness, soon regained her natural good humor, and, like the rest,

became absorbed in discussing what was to be done.

Verena was for letting matters take their course. Kate proposed a compromise by suggesting that they should take old Jake (a small, thin, wiry, grizzled, good-natured colored man, who for years had served as driver, errand-goer, factotum and under-gardener) into their confidence, vow, or, if necessary, bribe him to secrecy, and dispatch him as soon as possible to the school-house with orders to dismantle the figure, and restore everything to its proper place. Agnes objected; first, because, having done the mischief themselves, they were bound to undo it; secondly, because young ladies had no business either to bribe or to persuade servants to do such errands; finally, Jake was slow of comprehension, and would only be likely to make matters worse. This last argument seemed to have more weight than the purely moral ones, and, after a prolonged discussion, resumed after supper, the following foolish, hazardous, but, to the Thistles, exciting plan was finally adopted.

Mrs. Hill and her pupils attended a large Episcopal church on the outskirts of the town, about a mile from the school. A big omnibus, driven by Jake, conveyed as many of the girls and teachers as it could hold, starting early and returning to fetch one or more loads, as

required. On fine Sundays, however, Miss Clive usually headed a party of those who, like herself, preferred walking, often entrusting a detachment to the care of Miss Dorinda, Madame Verrier or of Miss Almira, who, although a Methodist, often went to the Episcopal services, her own chapel being at a much greater distance. The road to church ran within half a mile of Martin's Hill, and the conspirators were to contrive to walk home either with poor Dorinda or with Madame Verrier (who was a stanch Protestant, and, though not especially devout, delighted in talking about her Huguenot ancestors), engage their guide in conversation, and suggest making a *détour* to view the landscape from the high-perched school-house. Agnes and, if necessary, Kate or Cornie, was to beguile the teacher's attention while the others, entering as before, should dismantle the unlucky schoolmarm and restore things to their places as fast as possible.

It was not at all a Sunday sort of an expedition, and Agnes, who had begun by thinking herself bound to compel the others to undo their evil deeds as far as might be, now felt very serious doubts as to the wisdom of her course, especially as the Thistles, making light of the risk and inconvenience, which she had hoped might sober them, seemed only to think of the fun. Brownie felt differently, but her heart

was too full of grief at having brought her friends into this scrape for her to do anything but agree to what they wanted, and, as Cornie said, undertake the part of penitent for all four at once. And thus, *faute de mieux*, the plan was decided upon.

“But we can’t do it before afternoon!” exclaimed Kate. “To-morrow is the Confirmation—don’t you remember how Dr. Grimshaw said he would omit the first lesson, and the Litany, and his sermon in order to leave plenty of time for the Bishop’s address, and the Confirmation, and the Communion? I only wish he would omit his sermon every week! And, of course, Mrs. Hill and the General will sit downstairs, in a front pew, with our four candidates” (“Four wise virgins, to counterbalance our naughty quartette,” Verena put in here, and Cornie laughed), “and Madame will escort the seniors, who stay for the sacrament, and we Thistles will be handed over to the Dragon for the walk home. We can’t propose going to Martin’s Hill so soon again; and it’s nothing short of a miracle that she didn’t suspect us yesterday, and search, and find us out.”

Cornie and Verena sighed assent; and, after a fresh survey of the difficulty, all agreed that late in the long May afternoon would be the only time when they could put their scheme into execution.

“It’s a sad affair, girls!” said Agnes, as they adjourned. “I feel worse the more I dwell on it. Remember, I don’t want to preach to you” (“Don’t you, indeed?” thought Verena), “but this nonsense must be repaired somehow. You can’t let things alone, with the chance of being found out early next week; you must either confess to Mrs. Hill or try to undo your mischief at once.”

“Such a fuss!” Cornie began indignantly, when alone with Verena and Kate, Agnes having taken Brownie away with her. “One would fancy we had stolen something and had to take it back. I don’t care if those school-children are suspected, it couldn’t be proved, and wouldn’t be likely to hurt them much. Agnes thinks of those youngsters, and never of us. That is the way with your saints. I may be a dunce in some things, but I know well enough that they’re dreadfully tough sort of folks, who consider everybody before their own people. I’d rather have a less exalted person to deal with, who would be sensible, and comfortable, instead of a high-flyer who wanted to sacrifice us to their lofty notions.”

“Why don’t we rebel at once and tell Agnes that she may run over and settle things herself?” cried Verena, with flashing eyes. “Oh, I don’t care; I’m ready for anything—but you *are* so meek, Kate, when once your dear Agnes gets hold of you!”

Verena, pricked by conscience even while she spoke, felt a certain jealousy of Agnes' influence over Kate, aware that it aimed at withdrawing her from the Hungarian's society, and forced to acknowledge to herself that Agnes strove up towards a higher standard of conduct than theirs—doubly eager, in consequence, to complain of Agnes' weak point, her somewhat morbid scrupulosity, which, as in the present instance, led her to make mistakes with the best intentions. Cornie, as usual, took the most healthy and sensible view of any, declaring that, even allowing that they had greatly been to blame, the chances of any real trouble to the children at Martin's Hill were far too slight for it to be worth while for the real offenders to rush headlong into a scrape on their account. A "masterly inactivity" seemed to her the best course; but, if Kate, talked over by Agnes, persisted in going on this expedition, why, she would stand by her and not back out.

"Brownie is a simple little goosey, and Agnes, with her counsels of perfection, is a big intelligent goosey, and, between them, they will bring us into some fine adventure, you just see!" cried Verena fiercely.

"Never mind now!" cried Kate, in a quiver of excitement at the sound of a few bars of music from the parlor. "When they strike up that grand Russian hymn, or 'God Save the

Queen,' it's our signal to assemble on Saturday evenings for the tableaux, and we must hurry and get hold of Madame, or Julia & Co. will carry all before them and crowd us out."

Running in from the garden, they found the long parlor filled with girls busily preparing for the tableaux, under the direction of Madame, who was turning over a many-colored heap of stage properties which had been brought down from the stock accumulating at Mount Cedar year by year. The culprits had enough to drive serious thoughts out of their heads in the exciting struggle to gain for themselves and their friends a fair share of the amusements. Agnes, full of anxiety which disinclined her for gayety, found plenty to do in trying to restrain them, for their spirits, as soon as they were sure of having good places in the tableaux, grew so unmanageable that they threatened to betray themselves by suggesting all sorts of absurd subjects, likely to arouse suspicion, such as "The Burglarious Entry," which Kate offered to personate as a robber climbing in at a window, provoking intense mirth from Verena and Cornie, the latter proposing school subjects, but her jests were not sufficiently brilliant to attract attention, and were supposed to refer entirely to Mrs. Hill's institute.

Verena's fancy ran wild on conspiracies, and

she wished to drape a crowd of girls in waterproofs—as she said, to represent dominoes, with masks of white paper, whereat Kate and Cornie pealed with laughter—standing in a horror-stricken group round one lying stabbed upon the floor. High tragedy, however, did not seem to suit the general taste, which was what she and Kate considered terribly commonplace, for the others persisted in choosing very stupid subjects, such as “Hiring a Servant,” “Tea-Table Gossip,” and so forth, preferring the easy and grotesque to the tragic or melodramatic scenes, full of fair ladies, gypsies, ghosts, fairies and such like, which Kate and Verena loved. It was rather a misfortune that they had each been born with a tendency to dislike nearly everything pertaining to the beaten track in matters of taste, and of having small patience with many ordinary things acceptable to the other girls, while adoring many things quite out of their line; so that they naturally found occasional ridicule and a frequent lack of sympathy and companionship to be the result.

CHAPTER VI.

A BAD SUNDAY.

MISS CLIVE did not approve of crowding Bible lessons into the interval between breakfast and starting for church, so the garden next morning was filled with girls strolling about in the fresh, light spring dresses only worn on Sundays, or occasions when their uniform was laid aside. As Kate had said, there was to be a confirmation, and, although this time only four of Mrs. Hill's pupils were among the candidates, yet this served to create a small excitement. These four were members of Kate's class, but by no means "Thistles." Quiet, studious, well-behaved girls of about sixteen, they mingled but little with their wilder companions, and, though utterly free from either lofty or solemn airs, were, like Agnes and certain others, nicknamed "saints" in consequence.

Never happy unless she had a hand in everything, Miss Clive had bestowed upon these candidates a great deal of special instruction, and, having kept them apart from the others in what Kate called a "retreat" during much of the

preceding evening, she was now busily engaged in superintending their costume, arraying them in white gowns and sashes, tying their long hair with white ribbons, and sorely regretting that veils, in the English style, might not be worn.

“Why, Verena, you’re actually without either of your inseparables!” exclaimed Cornie. “What has happened? Are we found out?”

“Not yet,” laughed Verena, “but I’m afraid Foxey might suspect something, and Kate has gone off in one of her odd fits, hanging round the dormitory, trying, I suppose, to catch a glimpse of those four, as if they were great heroines. I only hope she won’t give out and spoil our precious piece of work. Couldn’t we manage to start early and entice poor Dorinda up Martin’s Hill ‘to see the view?’ ”

“No,” said Cornie, with decision, “not with all our commanders in the bustle they’re in this morning. I heard the General tell Jake to have the omnibus earlier than usual, and our class are to be the Dragon’s especial property. It’s a blessing that the General will sit downstairs!”

“Oh! Saint Agnes will keep an eye on us. I feel perfectly sure that while she sits there, looking so lovely, with her fresh complexion and rich auburn hair, and those deep, reddish-brown eyes—she’ll be wishing me back in Hun-

gary even harder than I wish it myself. I know she makes me responsible for Kate being so unlike what she was in the time of that dear little girl, whose picture she wears in her locket, more than all you other Thistles, because I'm one of the black-haired people, who are supposed to be naturally full of sin. Fanny declares that the Leslies, and Kate, and you, too, Cornie, belong to those blonde, light-haired persons who are presumed to be always sure to tell the truth."

"I remember," laughed Cornie, "she often says that deep brunettes, like herself, are considered rather 'Frenchy,' and not to be trusted, because the good girls were apt to be made fair, and the naughty ones dark, in the old-fashioned moralizing books."

Agnes, all through the service, was haunted by the prospect of their unlucky expedition and by a sense of deceit wholly new to her. Greatly doubting whether she had really done right in persuading the culprits to make amends in such left-handed fashion, she longed to induce them to tell Mrs. Hill, but knew this to be impossible, and knew of no other way of making an impression upon Kate. She fell into a mournful reverie about Virginia and days gone by. It might have comforted her to know that Kate's thoughts took the same direction, though she did not seem at all serious, but dis-

played a restless eagerness to lean over the edge of the gallery, where she sat between Cornie and Verena, to watch every detail of the confirmation. Innate shyness and the fear of ridicule often led her to assume a careless or defiant bearing in order to conceal what passed within; so that she had gained the character of being far more reckless than she was at heart. Brownie's sad, reproachful whisper as they went away, "Think of all those girls, and how different they are from us," was but the echo of her own mood, and, though she did not guess it, of Verena's also; while the sight of the hushed half-empty church as she glanced back into it kept haunting her with a longing sadness of which neither her teachers nor her sister Elisabeth would have deemed her capable. And, as usual, afraid of being laughed at, she displayed great levity and was remarkably wild all the way home, in company with the Hungarian, who, having never before seen an Episcopal confirmation, was naturally eager to enlighten her friends concerning the points of difference between this rite in America and the Lutheran confirmations she had witnessed in Europe.

"The Lutherans wear black confirmation dresses, do they?" exclaimed Cornie, in surprise, "and sometimes wreaths on their heads—oh, dear!"

“I don’t think young ladies wear wreaths, but peasant girls sometimes do. And, in Holland, they all wear white veils over black gowns; but I think black has no business at a confirmation; they should wear white, like the Catholics. But the Lutheran confirmations are very impressive, except as regards the dress. Oh! it was far worse a century ago. I read how Baron de la Motte Fouqué, who wrote ‘Undine’ and ‘Sintram,’ was confirmed in private, all by himself, in the parlor at home, with his relatives looking on and hearing him examined in the catechism—just fancy how dreadful!—and in French, too, because his family came from France—and I do think it is the last language for anything religious, don’t you? Oh! you may well go on, girls—I can tell you of a confirmation more terrible than that one. Madame Schopenhauer, the mother of the great pessimist, says, in her ‘Recollections,’ that, when she was not quite fourteen, she had to go alone, one spring morning, to the house of some old clergyman, where she was met by the tutor—a theological student—who had prepared her, and, you know, the Lutheran preparation for confirmation means a great deal. Well! it must have been more fearful than going to the dentist’s, for the poor child had to undergo her long examination and then to kneel down and be confirmed by the old pastor without a single

soul to keep her company—and I know, by the way you're all groaning and wondering, that you think it was worse than Baron Fouqué's confirmation, with his family looking on. I pity royal personages for having to be confirmed all alone; half the beauty of it, I think, is in having the young people side by side. In Europe we make a great deal out of it, but I think, judging by this morning, that you don't make near enough."

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Kate, deeply interested by all this information. "I saw an Anglican confirmation when I stayed in Canada, with the Leslies—Agnes was confirmed then—and it was perfectly beautiful—all the girls in white, with veils, and I wish the custom would come in here by the time we are candidates—if we ever are!"

So many laughing jests were showered upon Kate at the suggestion of herself or any of the Thistles becoming steady enough for confirmation within a century, or thereabouts, that her mad spirits rose still higher. Miss Almira rebuked them for being so noisy upon a Sunday, and the whole set, when they reached Mount Cedar, rushed off together for the spare time before dinner in a mood of insubordination sure to have aroused the righteous anger of the "General," if the latter, when she returned, had not been too much occupied with the girls

who had been confirmed and made their first communion, for her to notice the others.

Agnes, unused to any sort of plotting, was sorely worried that afternoon lest they should be obliged to walk home with Miss Almira or Miss Clive; but Kate and Verena, unwilling to entrust this important manoeuvre to her unskilled hands, bestirred themselves to secure Madame Verrier, Miss Dorinda, mildest and most easily managed of teachers, having remained with Mrs. Hill, who had had one of her bad nervous headaches, brought on by the long, crowded services of the morning. Secretly rejoicing, and making themselves as agreeable in French as possible, the party was just quitting the churchyard when Fanny Fox and Sophie Howard ran up and asked leave to join them.

Kate, as Cornie said afterwards, turned green with dismay at these unwelcome additions, greeted by unsuspecting Madame with a smiling face; and Verena began boldly declaring that they were going to walk some distance before going home; but Fanny and Sophie, who knew no fatigue, were not to be got rid of; and the conspirators, in a hurried council of war, settled that Agnes, as agreed, should occupy herself with Madame, Cornie and Brownie do their utmost to engage the attention of their unwished-for companions, while

the perilous errand to the school-house should be done by Verena and Kate.

The latter contrived to set off Madame upon her favorite topic of the Huguenots, over which she waxed so eloquent and excited that she accepted the proposal to walk up Martin's Hill without much heeding whither she was going. Agnes, more worried and anxious than ever, persuaded her to seat herself on the bench in the playground, with her back to the school-house; but to dispose of Fanny and Sophie was no such easy matter.

First, they traversed every foot of the enclosure, passing close beside the fatal window, to the unspeakable terror of the others, lest they should peep in and discern the school-marm in the dimly lighted room. Next they began to inflict some interminable story upon their wretched auditors, who only got rid of it by pleading fatigue and seating themselves near Madame, still absorbed in the woes of the Huguenots. The miserable conspirators, in utter despair, which produced a woefulness of countenance attributed by Madame to her thrilling description of a *dragonnade*, had just decided that their chance was lost, when Sophie Howard, famed for carelessness, contrived to tear a huge "barn door" in the front breadth of her Sunday frock. This naturally caused a sensation, purposely prolonged by Cornie and

Agnes, while Verena and Kate, after loudly expressing their sympathy, stole away from the group to the back of the building and, hardly breathing, raised the creaking sash and climbed inside.

“At last!” groaned Kate, “I thought we’d never manage it! Well, here’s our lovely work of art untouched. What a cruel shame to have to undo it!”

“Yes, but we’ve no time to lose,” said Verena, as they hastily took the figure to pieces, replaced the shoes, broom, cloak, etc., and, with unspeakable reluctance, effaced their cherished rhymes and drawings from the blackboard. Laughing below their breath, but working eagerly, they had almost finished when Verena’s quick ears caught the sound of feet and voices, and, before they could escape, their only way of retreat was suddenly blocked up by the thrice-unwelcome vision of Sophie’s merry face.

“Well, girls! What on earth are you doing inside?” was her sufficiently loud exclamation; while the others, in mortal terror, made a number of frantic gestures imploring silence.

Agnes still kept Madame occupied. Cornie, with much difficulty, retained Fanny beside her; but poor little self-reproachful Brownie, in her anxiety, had so terribly overacted the part assigned her of diverting Sophie’s

attention that her suspicions were aroused, and she hurried off to search for the missing couple. Once behind the school-house the open window met her gaze, and she had hardly uttered her expressions of surprise before Brownie, flushed and panting, stood by her side.

“There’s ‘something up,’ as we say,” went on Sophie, glancing from one panic-stricken face to another. “Well, if you won’t answer, I’ll come and find out.” So, without awaiting a reply, she nimbly climbed within.

“Oh, girls!” wailed poor Brownie as, for greater safety, she followed.

Verena was about to take the bull by the horns by giving Sophie some partial explanation which might satisfy her and securing secrecy as to their entering the building, a fact she truly thought Sophie not likely to betray, seeing that she had done it herself. But fresh perils awaited the delinquents, whose feelings grew unutterable when, alas! Fanny’s keen dark eyes came peering into the room, while her clear voice began, “Well, Sabbath-breakers, breakers of the rules, breakers of your teacher’s hearts, is house-breaking your last accomplishment?”

“Come in and join us,” said Verena boldly.

“Cornie!” cried Kate, as her friend’s tall figure appeared in the background, “is Madame Verrier coming next?”

“She’s safe enough on that bench, unless I choose to call her, which I don’t, if you’ll only tell me what this flurry means,” said Fanny, in her eagerness forgetting prudence and entering by the window; while Cornie, unwilling to risk being caught alone outside, soon followed.

“So this is your ‘Burglarious Entry,’ Kate,” proceeded Fanny, scrutinizing the few remains of the schoolmarm not yet removed. “There has been a fine piece of mischief played here, and I just mean to know what.”

“Then you’ll just have to do without it, my dear,” answered Cornie, whose physical strength and beauty gave her an *aplomb* denied to Kate, who began solemnly, “Fanny, whatever Sabbath-breaking, or anything else we may have done, just please remember that you yourself are in it, too.”

“Hear the child! What does she mean?” said Fanny, seating herself in the chair vacated by the unlucky schoolmarm, which the four conspirators heartily wished were enthroned there yet, instead of the mocking form of their teasing companion. “In it, too—and pray, what?”

“Yes, indeed,” Kate went on. “Hush, Verena, let me say one thing first. Fanny, you’ve lost all right to blame us for climbing in here, because you have done it yourself; and I think we four have a right to make you promise”——

“You four!” broke in Fanny, leaning back and shaking with laughter. “So Cornie was in it, too! Oh, Kate! I guessed as much, but I didn’t think you would let it out so soon. And Brownie, poor child, what sort of horrible mischief have you been leading her into?”

Brownie’s dark hazel eyes were filled with tears.

“There’s no time to lose,” began Cornie, with energy. “Will you give us your word to keep quiet, Fanny and Sophie, or not?”

Sophie, who had been scribbling on the blackboard, seemed willing; but Fanny, as usual, began her rattling fire of nonsense in reply until Kate sighed, and even Cornie’s placid temper became slightly ruffled.

“They’re coming! I hear them! Oh, let us go!” was the piteous wail of poor Brownie, who had kept guard beside the window.

“Mesdemoiselles, ou êtes-vous donc?” cried Madame, from round the other side. The sudden disappearance of four of her remaining audience and the half-stifled peals of laughter from within the building, had caused her to break off in the midst of a most striking narrative about a persecuted ancestor of her own, and hasten towards the back of the schoolhouse, followed by Agnes, whose anxiety nearly overpowered her.

There, beside the memorable window, stood

Kate, Brownie and Sophie. Fanny and Verena had not yet emerged, but poor Cornie, whose large size rendered her passage through the narrow opening less easy than it was for her companions, was crouching pitiably, half in and half out, upon the sill, in a most uncomfortable attitude, tightly wedged beneath the edge of the lower sash, which, like those of many old-fashioned country houses, had no cords, but was kept in its place by a stick, after being pushed up. Kate and Verena, in their hurry, had neglected to put this stick securely into place, so that the pressure of Cornie's large form and rapid motions had speedily dislodged it. Blockading the way for Fanny and Verena, who, worried, but convulsed with laughter, tried to lift the sash from within, and filling with untold dismay the other three, who were vainly struggling to raise it from without, Cornie, a heroine far from enjoying her prominence, sat unable to move backward or forward, so that the impression made by the entire group upon a ceremonious, dignified Frenchwoman, teacher of dancing and deportment, can hardly be put into words.

"I can't get out," quoth Cornie, like the famous starling, her handsome face crimson with fright and exertion. "O-h-h-h-h! Girls, the sash is *jammed*, I tell you, and it won't budge for any of you. It's tight; and it will take a man's strength to make it stir."

“A *man!*” gasped the horror-stricken Frenchwoman, in her native tongue. “Do you think, Mademoiselle Cornélie, that I am without shame, that I should permit one of your countrymen to behold you as you are now? And on Sunday, too, and on the way back from church!” sighed the doubly scandalized Protestant, as the combined horrors of the situation flashed upon her mind.

“I can’t help it,” was Cornie’s sulky reply, in English; “it’s worse for me than for anyone else. Give a good *hard* push, girls, all together; not such wretched little jerks, one by one. O-h-h-h, don’t squeeze me so!”

Agnes, Madame and the rest united their efforts to push up the miserable sash which, as Cornie said, was “jammed,” and only yielded after a vigorous and combined struggle. Panting, hot and tumbled, the unlucky captive was at length released, Fanny and Verena climbing out after her.

“And now, Mesdemoiselles!” Madame began her oration to the abashed group, while Cornie combed back her tangled locks and tried to restore shape to the crushed, battered straw hat which had fallen from her head in the turmoil and been trodden by Sophie under foot. What the justly irate teacher went on to say need not be particularized; but the culprits, though pretty well “taken down,” as they

would have expressed it, consoled themselves by reflecting that, after all, Madame only thought their escapade a silly freak of the moment, and did not appear to suspect anything behind. Agnes and Brownie stood silent and sorrowful; Cornie pouted and rearranged her dress; Fanny, divining that she and Sophie were far less guilty than the rest, but willing to hold her tongue, bore the lecture with *sang-froid*, as usual. Kate was perhaps more unhappy than any, for Verena's spirits, though outwardly repressed, actually rose to a pitch of morbid excitement at thus finding herself in a genuine "scrape" among half a dozen girls, instead of being bitterly and unjustly reproved by old Mrs. Forbes (her half-brother's mother-in-law, of the darkest Calvinistic tendencies) in helpless loneliness at home.

All, of course, were ready to promise amendment; and the party finally set off, Cornie bringing up the rear with Madame, who kept up a steady lecture upon her undignified, improper conduct. The others walked two by two, conversation being forbidden for the nonce. Kate, at any other time, would have enjoyed this walk in the golden light of the May evening, but her heart was sad, and a discovery she made as they entered the grounds of Mount Cedar completed her wretchedness.

Her locket was gone. She distinctly remem-

bered feeling it upon her neck in the school-house; it must, therefore, have dropped off there, or on the way home. If found in the school-house, and traced to Mount Cedar, Miss Clive would be sure to investigate the whole affair until she knew the truth, which Madame would be sure to tell at once. If not found, then she had lost her most precious ornament, which could never be replaced, and that, to her excited fancy, seemed to have been taken from her as a punishment. She feared to tell Agnes, and shrank even from mentioning it to Verena, who, when supper was over, again joined Fanny Fox.

Kate was not exactly jealous; she knew that her imaginative Magyar friend at heart liked her better than anyone; but to-night it deepened her melancholy feeling of being solitary amid the crowd of girls who were talking and laughing together. She stole out into the garden, away from the ceaseless noise. In the soft, dim twilight she caught a glimpse of the white dresses of the four girls who had been confirmed, walking in couples a little way off. No wonder that they wished to be alone together, out of doors—but she could not bear to intrude upon them; she hurried away, revolving plan after plan for regaining her locket without raising inquiry or suspicion—and the sole assistant whom she could think of to help her in this emergency was—Old Jake.

If Jake could be persuaded to go privately and search the school-house, Kate thought there might be a chance of finding it. Jake, though slow-brained, was a staid, honest, civil, good-hearted old fellow, whom she knew she might trust. The bare idea of telling Madame and asking permission to go there herself never crossed Kate's mind.

Jake, his Sunday toils as coachman ended, was sitting on a bench beside the paling of the kitchen garden, duly provided with temporal and spiritual refreshment in the shape of a paper of hard gingerbread, a well-filled pipe and a Methodist hymn book. The terror of his harmless life was Sandy, the gardener, a shrewd, capable, sanctimonious Scotch Presbyterian, who surveyed poor Jake's ignorance and slow-wittedness from the heights of his own superiority. This "puir, feckless auld bodie," as Sandy called him, looked up with pleasure as Kate drew near. She liked poor Jake, and, encouraged by Mrs. Hill, had sometimes read to him on Sundays from the Bible and hymn book, at which he spelled so painfully by himself.

The pipe was quickly laid aside, and the gingerbread (of the old-fashioned "horsey-cake" description) respectfully offered to his young visitor, who gratified him by breaking off a small piece ere she began a concise statement

of her troubles in language sufficiently plain and simple to be soon understood by her sympathizing listener, who, having once fairly taken the idea, promised her his utmost help and secrecy. She did not, of course, mention the first visit to Martin's Hill, and had much ado to restrain her laughter at his ludicrous face and exclamations when she described Cornie's perplexity and Madame's wrath. He professed himself shocked at such tricks upon a Sunday, and stoutly declined any reward for his trouble, declaring that little Miss Katie had always been so kind to him that it was a pleasure to serve her. Kate, low-spirited as she was, felt grateful even for his childlike sympathy, and offered to read to him if he would go indoors; but Jake, before whose mental vision hovered the grim, lantern-jawed face of Sandy, pervading the kitchen regions with his most rigid Sabbath-evening expression, declared humbly, but firmly, that he would much rather stay in the garden, adding meekly that he would be very thankful to Miss Katie if she would be so good as to repeat to him some of the hymns in his book, which she had read to him so often, and knew by heart. He knew them himself after a fashion, only he always did get so puzzled by the long words.

Kate, whose memory for rhyme was the wonder of her teachers—co-existing, as it did, with

a very uncertain memory for dry studies, science and the most important events in history—felt glad to oblige the old fellow. So, seated upon the other end of the bench, among the feathery asparagus bushes that softly rustled round her in the twilight, watching the stars come out, she recited a number of hymns, and was rewarded by hearing his gasping sighs of enjoyment, especially when she repeated Charles Wesley's "Wrestling Jacob," which, though he did not half understand it, was his favorite, from its melodious rhythm, and because his own name figured in the title. Kate felt that she now acquitted herself far better than if she had been standing up before the school with Miss Clive ready to criticize every word. Her voice, at first restrained, rose by degrees with her own gathering excitement. She ceased to think whether anyone might overhear her, absorbed in the strange delight of declaiming a kind of poetry that it would have overpowered her with confusion to have to recite before an audience. Finally, having raised the simple-hearted old man to the seventh heaven of innocent rapture by this, the one virtuous action of her extraordinary Sunday, Kate left him, receiving his reiterated promise to go and search for her locket as soon and as secretly as possible.

Quietly she stole back to the house, passing,

in the darkness, some half-seen figures, which she took for the girls who had been confirmed, at a little distance. The Sunday-evening music had not begun, and the noisy chatter of the parlor and the porch jarred yet more unpleasantly upon her by contrast with the fresh night wind and calm, deep, starlit sky. Her heart felt less heavy, and, obeying a sudden impulse, she ran upstairs towards Agnes Leslie's room, which was one of a row of tiny chambers high up in the wings, allotted to elder scholars. Breathless, and slightly wondering why she had come, she tapped at the door.

"Come in," said Agnes, in her soft English voice; and Kate entering, perceived her friend's figure seated at the window in dusky relief against the starry sky, while she again began to call herself a goose for having come, especially when Agnes, offering her a chair, professed gladness at seeing her arrive of her own accord, as she had wanted to see her and had thought of sending Brownie to look for her.

"Agnes!" began Kate, with desperate boldness, "hasn't this first Sunday in May been a most remarkable jumble, even for our school?"

"Not a very 'white stone day' for some of us, at least," Agnes answered more cheerfully than Kate had expected. "You must know, Kate, that though I blame you all—and yourself in particular—yet I blame my own self even

more for sitting carelessly on that bench talking, instead of looking after you. I might have known''——

“That we weren't to be trusted?” broke in Kate. “Well!—Oh, Agnes, it may be easy for you to be good, you never wanted to do anything wrong; you never were a Thistle, even when you first came here, when you were thirteen. And Elisabeth, too, she has no temptations, because she doesn't want to do anything but just sit at a desk, with a big pile of books, and such an expression of superiority, and everyone praises her for being so good. She can't possibly understand how I love to get into a gale of high spirits, because I have an inner life, and—oh, I know she's desperately studious, but even Miss Clive says that she has no originality, she can't do anything except just take in—and she knows that I, her naughty sister, do possess some originality; so she's secretly jealous and snubs me.”

This plain statement contained much truth, to which Agnes hardly knew how to reply. She felt sorrowful; she longed to find some way of impressing Kate's feelings and moral sense without starting her off after any wild fancies, and casting more serious thoughts into the background, where, according to all appearances, they habitually dwelt in Kate.

The latter, fortunately, gave her an open-

ing by adding, in a melancholy voice, as she sat with her head bowed upon the window sill, "When Virginia was alive it was so different. How would it be, I wonder, if she were here now? Would I want to romp and carry on—and she not care for me?"

"I think, Kate, that you would have developed a love for what you call 'carrying on,' but that she might have helped to restrain you. And Verena Forster, I can see—everyone can see—only excites you the more."

Agnes spoke without jealousy; but poor Kate, eager to defend Verena, launched forth into a wild appeal on her behalf, dwelling, not without some eloquence, upon what she knew of her home trials, with their tendencies to make her fierce and headstrong; so that Agnes, whose home memories were of the happiest, listened with unfeigned sympathy, which so softened Kate for the moment that her friend, again turning the conversation upon Virginia, contrived to bestow some wholesome counsels which Kate, to do her justice, received with meekness and patience quite unusual.

It might have been better if Agnes had stopped here, for, like all painfully scrupulous persons, she very soon had said too much. Aware that Kate regretted the nearness of her leaving school, and eager to make the most of what might prove to be their last private inter-

view, she proceeded to talk very seriously about the effect of Kate's and Verena's wildness upon Brownie and the younger girls.

"Brownie is naturally a great deal more unselfish and conscientious than you are (Kate mentally agreed, though somewhat vexed by the plain statement), and not nearly so clever (Kate felt quite happy again). She seldom thinks about herself, as you and Verena are all the time doing. (Exactly; she hasn't much of a self worth thinking about!) She gets into trouble through her amiability and love for pleasing others. (No wonder, for never thinking of oneself, and rushing headlong into what other folks want you to do, is a short road into trouble at any time, as even I, with my wickedness, have experienced, thought Kate, glancing back over her five years at school.) I don't want to talk about your position here, and all that—but I do wish you and your friends would have conscience enough not to lead others wrong."

Kate, inwardly smitten, but still indignant, drew down the corners of her rather large but firm mouth with a mock-heroic air of distress.

"I wish I were one of the Saints!" she began dolefully. "I wish I were dull, and meek, and quiet, and hated romping, and hadn't any tastes in particular, and no imagination, and no love for anything besides study, and obeying people

—like the girls who were confirmed to-day—for then I could be good, too.”

“You don’t wish it at all,” said Agnes boldly. “You are conscious at this very moment, and rejoicing in the consciousness, of having far more brains than any of those girls, and feeling, in a wrong-headed sort of way, as if that fact somehow made up for your not being half so good.”

Agnes, though not far wrong, had overshot the mark. The dramatic Kate, unduly excited, needed only this thrust to start her off into a tirade of mock-heroic misery for her own shortcomings, using very careless language, laughing at much that she really respected, abusing unmercifully what she called the heavy dullness and want of intellectuality of some of the “saints,” and taking so much pains to seem far worse than she really was that Agnes regretted having spoken. She could not guess how Kate’s inner life, at this period, was, as she expressed it long afterwards, in a state of siege and starvation, as she went on:

“I know you’ve been trying to convert me for ever so long; but it’s no use. Give me a slow, quiet, easy-going brain, without the shadow of a fancy in it, and I’ll soon be a model. But, with the one I have—never mind!”

Agnes saw that she was doing no good, and judged it best to cut the unsuccessful parley

short. Rising and turning on the light, she took a small book from her shelf, marked one or two places in pencil, and handed it to Kate, with a request that she would not open it until she should give her leave, perhaps long after they had each left school.

“‘The Temple,’ by George Herbert,” cried Kate, in astonishment. “Oh! Pious poetry! Agnes, you were intended to be a clergy-woman, I’m sure.”

“Nonsense; be quiet one moment! I don’t want you to read any of it now. There is one poem, ‘The Elixir,’ which I have marked as a good lesson for you—some day—when you are wiser. Promise me that you will not open it until I let you. I know you love mystery, though you don’t love obedience. Promise me!”

“Well, I suppose I must!” growled Kate, with assumed sulkiness.

Agnes took up a pen and wrote some words on the fly-leaf, proceeding next to secure safety by carefully wrapping and sealing up the volume ere she delivered it to Kate, who received it with serio-comic thanks, cut short by Grace Howard’s knock at the door to summon Agnes to the Sunday music. Kate rushed away and hid the book in her alcove, then hastened to the parlor, where Cornie instantly darted at her to pour forth complaints because of the extra

French lessons imposed upon them by Madame as a punishment for their conduct that afternoon, which, for Cornie, were indeed no joke. Verena had taken her place among the chief singers, and slyly nodded over to Kate, who hardly saw her, absorbed in watching the girls who had been confirmed as they came in, looking, with their pure white dresses and calm, sweet faces, like young angels to her own excited fancy, feeling, as she did, how much happier they must be than she herself just now. They might be far less clever, unable to appreciate many things that Kate loved; yet they seemed so happy—why must there be such a gulf between herself and those gentle maidens at her side? Her mind was in a whirl which the solemn music of the organ and the clear sound of all those young voices increased until she could hardly keep from sobbing. What was her dismay when Fanny suddenly gave her a half-perceptible nudge and whispered:

“Well, little Eva, how you did charm old Uncle Tom to-night!”

Kate flushed scarlet with confusion as it flashed upon her that the tormenting “Foxey” must have been out in the garden and overheard her reciting hymns to poor Jake. One of those dim forms she had seen when returning to the house must have been that of her persecuting companion, who went on slyly bantering until Kate felt nearly frantic.

She contrived to slip away from Fanny's neighborhood, and crouched down half-hidden behind the group round the organ, closing her eyes and weeping silently. Whether her comrades in mischief were at all repentant she could not tell, no one, except little Brownie, seeming in the least dejected, save at the prospect of punishment; but Kate, capable at least of more seriousness, exhausted by anxiety and saddened by the loss of Virginia's locket, avoided her lively fellow-Thistles when prayers were over, and, creeping quietly upstairs to her refuge in the dormitory, soon cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

CONSEQUENCES.

MONDAY dawned with a chilly rain, so that Jake, who dreaded what he called "the rheumatics," was unable to carry out his project of going to Martin's Hill before breakfast, with which he had raised Kate's spirits on Sunday evening. Her new day began inauspiciously, like the preceding one. Distress about her locket and a haunting sense that the trouble from that unlucky freak was not yet over, united to render her by turns melancholy and wilder than usual. Outward influences of earth and sky always powerfully affected her sensitive nature, and, like Verena during the gathering storm, she longed to be alone, to dream, to watch the dim, rainy landscape and escape from the noisy bustle of the school. Even the continued high spirits of the Hungarian, who seemed to have formed quite an alliance with Fanny Fox, helped to depress Kate, though she struggled hard to hide her sadness, aware that any sign thereof would bring "Foxey" down upon her with the charge of "having a good fit," and a string of mock-

ing allusions to her reciting hymns to poor Jake, varied by copious references to the scrape at Martin's Hill by way of contrast.

Things improved in the afternoon; the weather cleared, and Jake, who had to go on an errand, contrived to fulfill his promise to Kate, whose heart, however, sank still lower when the old man, with genuine distress, owned that his careful search along the road and in the school-house had been in vain. Tuesday morning found her vainly trying to nerve herself to tell Madame and secure her assistance; but this, for a girl like Kate, was far easier said than done.

School did not proceed at all smoothly on this warm, bright Tuesday morning. Perhaps the languid spring weather may have aggravated the general restlessness, for the rows of desks occupied by the Thistles, as well as those belonging to the juniors, soon became the scene of a variety of absurd pranks affording huge delight to their silly perpetrators and vexation to Miss Clive, whose fiery temper was most sorely tried. Verena, unable to be quiet, incited her friends to a combined raid upon the contents of Cornie's pocket, when the latter, somewhat rashly, ventured to turn them out under cover of her desk-lid, and soon wrote a descriptive catalogue thereof, which, brushed aside by Fanny's sweeping locks as she stooped to gather up some spilt mint-drops, fluttered down at

the very feet of the "General" as she returned from hearing a class in another room. Lifting the paper, headed "Contents of a Young Lady's Pocket," she solemnly mounted the platform, where, unwilling to forego producing a sensation, she read out the absurd list in a cruelly clear, piercing voice, summoning "Cornelia Mary Freeman" to receive a rebuke for bringing such articles as candies, peanuts, jackstones, gingerbread, loose beads, ends of ribbon, photographs, a jews'-harp, etc., into school, while the scholars now present (unluckily including "Maxwell, Morgan & Co.") listened with very unconcealed delight.

"It might have been worse," said Cornie philosophically, when they were in the garden. "I once got caught with a note to Kate full of strictures on the General, and had barely time to tear it up before she summoned me; and to-day even the Saints seem to get into trouble, for Agnes got rebuked for inattention and Queen Bess broke down in geometry."

Agnes' inattention, in truth, was caused by her anxiety about Kate, who since Sunday evening had quietly avoided her. The girls had reassembled awaiting various teachers who delayed their coming, causing many wild conjectures and low comments suddenly silenced by the entrance of Mrs. Hill, looking more than usually careworn, Miss Clive with heightened

color, Miss Almira seeming very sad, and Miss Dorinda with an air of wonder. Madame Verrier followed, and, bringing up the rear, with nervous glance and an uncertain tread, came a young woman named Bessie Johnson, a dress-maker, who often worked for the girls, and who, as Kate remembered with sickening terror, was a younger sister of the schoolmistress at Martin's Hill. Could they have been found out? She grew positively faint with apprehension, which was not lessened when, Mrs. Hill having taken her seat, Miss Clive ranged the other teachers on one of the long benches at the side of the platform, and made the young woman sit facing them opposite. Evidently something was about to happen, and the whole school looked up in silent wonder while Miss Clive, erect and awful in her stateliness, arose and held up to their astonished gaze—Kate's locket.

"'This locket,'" she began, in measured tones, "was this morning discovered lying—it might have been purposely concealed—beneath a pile of loose papers and rubbish in the chimney-place of the school-house at Martin's Hill. Miss Johnson, the mistress, had it brought to her by some of her pupils. Opening it, and seeing the inscription of 'Virginia Elisabeth Leslie' inside, and knowing that her sister here worked for a Miss Leslie at this house, she sent it here by her in order to find its owner."

Eager silence; but Agnes' face of pained surprise and Kate's look of mingled joy and overpowering anxiety were a study.

"Sarah Johnson," pursued Miss Clive loftily, "suggested that it might have been stolen and secreted where it was found. Her scholars denied all knowledge of it. But one of her boys said that last evening as he passed the school, about sunset, he met our own servant, Jacob Handy, stealing round a corner of the building as though he wished to escape notice. I desire to make no specific charges, nor to hazard a conjecture as to by what extraordinary circumstances this locket, belonging, as I know, to Katharine Armstrong, could have been hidden in the place where it was found. The facts, however, are most singular and suspicious, and it is my intention at once to have them sifted to the bottom."

At the mention of Kate's name the whole assemblage of teachers and scholars turned their wondering eyes towards the spot where she sat with uplifted head and burning cheeks. Verena and the other Sunday culprits of course guessed at once how matters stood. The rest were divided between strong suspicions of some trick on Kate's part and a reluctant doubt as to the honesty of poor old Jake.

"Katharine Gordon Armstrong!" Miss Clive rolled forth with awful distinctness and

solemnity, "leave your seat and come forward."

Kate's face grew sickly white as, returning Verena's sympathizing hand pressure with a convulsive squeeze, she arose and slowly ascended the platform with unsteady steps. The glimpse of bright blue sky, seen through the large open windows behind Mrs. Hill's chair, seemed like the final farewell of earth taken by a prisoner on his way to execution; and she wildly envied the happy little birds who were hopping and twittering among those green, waving tree-tops yonder.

"This is yours?" said Miss Clive sharply, indicating the locket.

Kate could only answer by hastily bowing her head.

"Yours. Then speak out. Sent to you by Virginia Leslie's mother soon after the death of the little companion whose influence kept you a far better child than you have ever been since, and infinitely better than the friends (Miss Clive purposely assumed a sarcastic tone which made Verena's blood boil, and she clenched and shook her little fists beneath her desk) whose company you affect would seem to make you now. (Kate looked and felt ready to annihilate her teacher, while even placid Cornie murmured something angry to Fanny, who was too wise to hazard a reply.) Now you

have heard how and where it was found, and how circumstances appear to implicate Jacob Handy in a theft. If stolen from you, it was a clumsy theft. If you yourself lost it (Kate here gave a half-perceptible start and drew in her breath), you"—Miss Clive at this point of her oration was interrupted by Mrs. Hill, who called her to her side, and a whispered parley ensued between them for a few moments. Kate seized the opportunity to glide close to Madame, and murmur, in French, "I must tell them all, must I not, for poor old Jacob's sake?"

Madame nodded, while Kate, sickening at the prospect of having to confess far more than that good lady had any idea of, felt scarcely relieved by her glance of evident approval.

"Kate will tell everything and get us all into an awful scrape," muttered Cornie to Verena, whose dark gray eyes were flashing with excitement. "Oh, that tiresome locket! Kate's sentiment about the thing always was a bore anyhow, but now—oh, dear, she'll ruin us all with her candor, if Saint Agnes and Brownie don't get ahead of her, which is worse!"

Fanny and Sophie were philosophically resigned, the latter taking matters easily, as usual; while the former, it must be owned, rather enjoyed the prospect of finding out whatever tricks had, as she from the first suspected,

led Verena and Kate to climb into the shut-up school-house. Poor Brownie, trembling, looked over to Agnes for sympathy, but found her entirely absorbed in watching Kate.

Miss Dorinda was sent out of the room by Mrs. Hill, who, pitying Kate's evident distress, said to her a few kind words about "nobody supposing that she had done anything wrong," which were like coals of fire on her guilty head. A solemn pause ensued, broken only by the whispers of the girls and the murmured conversation of Miss Clive and her superior, until Kate, still standing on the platform, though, poor child, this time her prominence certainly gave her no pleasure, perceived Dorinda returning with the small, bent, wiry form of Jake at her heels, an air of intense dismay and wonder upon his black, simple, monkey-like old face.

Poor Jake; he had been abruptly summoned from the cellar, where Sandy, as usual, while helping him to pile the coals, had likewise been metaphorically hauling him over the same. Marveling, in a vacant, helpless sort of way at the strangeness of being brought into the school-room, and vaguely anticipating some grievous charge from Miss Clive for he knew not what dire offence or negligence, he meekly trod behind Miss Dorinda, and paused tremblingly at the foot of the steps leading to the platform, as though hesitating to intrude

himself among the high dignitaries seated thereon.

“What a new development,” whispered Fanny to Verena. “I thought we would be summoned next, instead of Jake.”

Jake’s dull countenance brightened a little as, looking up, he caught sight of “Miss Katie” on the platform. Miss Clive beckoned to him to come near, and, he having shyly and slowly plodded up the steps, she would probably have addressed him in language far too choice for his comprehension, had not Kate, daring from sheer desperation, darted forward, and, rushing past the astonished “General,” seized Mrs. Hill’s thin, feverish hand, exclaiming wildly, “Let me tell you all about it, for Madame knows it is true.”

“You mean about your locket?” said Mrs. Hill kindly. “Did you tell Madame that it was lost?”

Poor Kate flushed a deeper crimson than ever, wishing now, too late, that she had had the courage to do so and secure an ally in Madame before this crisis. Unable to reply, she hung her head.

“There is something exceedingly remarkable in your demeanor, Katharine Armstrong,” Miss Clive recommenced abruptly. “You behave far more like a culprit now than Jacob. Do you believe that he had had anything to do

with your losing your locket? Explain yourself at once."

Kate, who, with all her terror, felt rather piqued at being addressed in this stern, sharp, impatient tone when she had actually volunteered to explain everything, asserted, somewhat shortly, that she was certain he had had nothing whatever to do with hiding it.

"Nothing to do with hiding it? In what way, then, had he to do with it?"

"I lost it," answered Kate, in a low, distinct voice, twisting her hands in nervous agony, while Agnes, at her desk, drew a long breath of relief. She had feared lest Kate, hard pressed, might be tempted to equivocate, and was herself determined to hasten to the rescue with a full confession if necessary, but wished first to let Kate ease her burdened conscience.

"You lost it?" Miss Clive repeated impatiently. "How, then, could it have been found in the school-house on Martin's Hill?"

"I must have dropped it there," Kate murmured half inaudibly, feeling her momentary courage fail now that a full disclosure seemed inevitable.

"*Mais oui*; Mademoiselle was up there, on that hill, on Sunday afternoon with me," Madame began eagerly, feeling that it was time to speak and wishing to divert general attention from Kate. Other helpers were at hand, for

Agnes quickly rose and approached the platform, with burning cheeks, and little Brownie, slipping out from among the desks, joined her, seized her arm, and mounted the steps.

Kate knew that Agnes was prepared to tell everything, and a wild jumble of feelings prompted her to make a full confession, partly from a genuine sense of right and justice, partly from a pardonable desire to carry out her rôle of a willing penitent without having it assumed by Brownie or Agnes because she had not the courage to sustain it herself. And so she dashed madly into her subject, bidding a mental adieu to all present hopes of prizes or theatricals with a heartfelt pang.

"I missed the locket when we came home from Martin's Hill on Sunday afternoon. We had persuaded Madame to walk there. She sat with Agnes on a bench in the playground, and I—I—I"—Kate stammered, longing to find some way of confessing her own sins without implicating the others.

"Continuez, Mademoiselle," began Madame encouragingly.

"You carelessly lost this costly keepsake?" exclaimed Miss Clive, uplifting the shining chain and locket, at sight of which poor Jake, who had had a very vague, confused idea of what it was all about, raised his eyes and hands with a joyful, half-checked ejaculation of

“Glory, glory!” which drew forth a frown from Miss Clive and a titter from the girls.

“Silence, Jacob!” said Mrs. Hill, not unkindly, for the old fellow’s childlike joy fully convinced her of his perfect innocence. “You shall tell us afterwards. Go on, Kate!”

Kate, stung into transient boldness, was about to proceed when the general attention was suddenly diverted by Verena, who (unable, as she told Fanny, to see Kate victimized any longer), rising from her seat, with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes that made the girls wonder anew at her wild beauty, stepped quickly out into the middle of the room, and, quivering with excitement, mounted the steps.

“What is this?” said Miss Clive sternly. “Wait till you are summoned.”

“I have something to say,” replied the Hungarian, quite undaunted and tingling with combative eagerness. “Mrs. Hill, I beg you, let me speak!”

“You certainly shall,” was the reply, in tones of unwonted energy. “Adelaide Clive, you have said enough. I wish to hear these children now.”

“We went up the hill,” began Verena, who, finding herself “in for a scrape,” was resolved to bear herself bravely and win approbation, at least for her prowess.

“Martin’s Hill?” broke in Miss Almira, sud-

denly mindful of the mysterious disappearance of four of her party during their excursion on Saturday morning. "Girls, you went there with me, and ran off—all but Agnes—and said you had been looking about the school-house. Do you actually mean to say that you got inside?"

"We did on Sunday, and Madame knows," said Verena unflinchingly.

Madame, dismayed by the faces of Mrs. Hill and Miss Clive, which, the former surprised and grieved, the latter shocked and indignant, looked at her for an explanation, began an eager half-French, half-English account of "Madoiselle Cornélie's" unladylike predicament, and so forth, to the intense amusement of her audience of innocent maidens, a troop of whom sorely grumbled at having to quit the school-room in the midst of this exciting narrative for the purpose of attending a class.

"I wasn't the first," pleaded Cornie, as she, in obedience to the awful summons, appeared before the seat of judgment, with Fanny and Sophie at her heels. "Kate and Verena got in first, before me."

The intense surprise, mingled with amusement, upon Bessie Johnson's fresh, rustic countenance, and old Jake's expression of vague anxiety as they surveyed each other across the platform, helped to enhance the

extraordinary aspect of the motley group assembled there for what, as Fanny whispered to Verena, was the most solemn and severe court-martial ever held since she came to the school. Miss Almira, now thoroughly roused to suspect everything, was just beginning an exhortation to the offenders when Mrs. Hill stopped her to announce that all lessons, for Kate's class and some others, would be suspended until the affair was cleared up. ("We get off from the Dragon's arithmetic, that's some comfort!" whispered Cornie in Sophie's ear.) Agnes drew nearer to Miss Clive, exclaiming, "I was to blame for not looking after them;" and Kate, seizing Verena's hand, cried, "No; she had nothing to do with it! It was all our own doing."

"We climbed in at the back window, and Kate must have dropped her locket in the schoolroom by the chimney place," Verena added boldly.

"In through the school-house window? And on Sunday afternoon! Pray, what excuse is there for such a vulgar, unladylike piece of nonsense?" asked Miss Clive. "Let me know what took you there."

Silence; but eager, imploring glances from Agnes to Kate.

"We had to go there," slowly repeated Kate, raising her eyes and looking Agnes full in the

face with a determined expression which her friend had seldom seen there before, and that implied a request for no further intervention, seeing that, if Kate must be forced into a full confession, she would do it boldly, and not give Agnes or others reason to reproach her with cowardice at the last.

“Had to go there? Be more explicit. I do not understand.”

“We had been there on Saturday,” went on Kate, miserable, yet amused by Jake’s puzzled face and Fanny’s quick glance of gratified curiosity. “We four, I mean—Cornie, and Verena—and I”——

“And I!” faltered Brownie, choking with tears as she came forward and seized Mrs. Hill’s hand. “Oh!—it was I who proposed climbing in!”

“Yes; but we would have done it all the same without you,” cried Kate, who, having once made the awful plunge, grew bold again with excitement. “It was I who first climbed inside—and it was a very odd sort of place, with things lying about—and—we took an old waterproof cloak that was hanging there and put it over a broom propped in a chair to look like a figure of the schoolmistress, and”——

Bessie Johnson, whose sympathies seemed to be much more with the culprits than with her own sister, the schoolmistress, who was fond

of lecturing her about her gay costume on Sundays, and otherwise unduly presuming upon her few years of seniority and the superiority of her position as a schoolmarm over that of a mere dressmaker, here burst out with an irrepressible peal of laughter, which, though speedily choked by her sense of propriety, was really a great comfort and encouragement to Kate, almost ready to join in it as she watched the "General's" lowering brows.

"Oh, laws, oh, massey, Miss Katie dear!" Jake kept groaning to himself, with sundry unintelligible ejaculations, as he slowly rocked to and fro.

The universal thrill of curiosity, amusement and anxiety now pervading the audience, largely composed of girls whose teachers, instead of holding their usual classes, were engaged upon the platform, may be imagined. Mrs. Hill, roused into unwonted animation, and quite repressing Miss Clive, proceeded to question Kate, who was at first inclined to suppress unnecessary particulars, but, finding the case hopeless, launched boldly forth, assisted by the undaunted Verena, into a full account of the unlucky joke.

"You stuck a pipe into the paper mouth, did you?" gasped Miss Clive, in a tragic tone strangely at variance with the words, while Jake's thick lips quivered with mirth and

Bessie Johnson's face beamed anew as Kate added "Yes; and Verena drew her such a delightful face"——

"She brought it home on Sunday," put in Cornie, "in her pocket."

Verena, being desired to produce this especial *corpus delicti*, went calmly to her desk, rummaged it and returned, saying with a coolness that positively sent a thrill through her companions in misfortune, "It isn't there; it must be upstairs; but I can soon get it for you."

"And there were gum-shoes," moaned poor Brownie, "great big ones—and a torn old arithmetic book that I put on the desk in front of her."

"And a pair of frightful mittens, for hands that looked like paws; but I put them back," went on Verena; and thus, one after another, the several culprits, including Agnes, who, full of self-reproach, explained to Mrs. Hill the part she had taken in trying to repair the mischief, had given a long, somewhat confused but, on the whole, correct description of the whole affair, interrupted by frequent and voluble French comments from Madame, now first enlightened as to the entire enormity, and sundry exclamations from Miss Almira and Miss Clive; while Jake, equally astonished, groaned in chorus.

Fanny and Sophie, being innocent of the

original mischief, received a comparatively mild reproof; but the united eloquence of Mrs. Hill and her subordinates was called into requisition for the four young outlaws who had caused such a disturbance. Mrs. Hill pleaded and appealed to their consciences. Miss Clive thundered an oration that gave free vent to her long-gathering wrath, including many a severe remark intended for Almira, whose lack of supervision had made the mischief easy. Madame lectured upon impropriety harder than even she had done on Sunday, and poor Miss Almira, unwilling to enter then and there into a contest with the "General," solaced herself by indulging in a harangue which would have suited a genuine class-meeting at her own chapel, every fresh sentence whereof, though failing to impress the Thistles save to make them want to smile, elicited a groan and an upward roll of the eyes from Jake.

Brownie cried incessantly, clinging to Agnes, who perhaps suffered more than the guilty ones, for Cornie never felt blame very deeply, and Verena, since she had been thrown into the throbbing life of a great school, was so elated by the sense of companionship that it neutralized her fears after the first shock was over. Kate, haunted by the terror of being debarred from acting, but otherwise much amused by the sensation their recital had produced, bore her

scoldings with apparent calmness, thankful when they were finally released with only the penalty of bad marks, several extra lessons and a somewhat shorter noontide recess than the others for a certain period. After all, now that the fuss was over, she thought it was worth undergoing for the sake of regaining her beloved locket, which Mrs. Hill restored to her with many serious words.

But, alas!—Jake, whose errand to Martin's Hill had long since been explained and himself mildly rebuked for undertaking to search in such a burglarious fashion, now, poor fellow, began to vent his innocent joy at seeing "Miss Katie's" locket regained after she had lost all hope of finding it, by abusing his own failing sight and awkwardness in not having looked more thoroughly in every corner of the school-house, winding up with an incoherent apostrophe of respectful devotion to Kate, alluding to the kindness she had always shown him, and dilating, to her intense confusion, on the numerous hymns she had so beautifully recited to him on Sunday evening in the garden.

In vain she tried to make him stop by frowning and slightly shaking her head—the simple old soul did not understand, but went on, utterly unconscious of the acute mortification he was causing her, until Miss Clive broke in rudely with, "So this was part of your per-

formance, Katharine Armstrong, playing miserable, childish tricks, which you needs must break Sunday to undo, and then trying to involve Jacob in your wretched nonsense, while you pretended to be so good and religious, saying hymns by the dozen, when you had been playing such a disgraceful game on your way back from church that very afternoon. How I despise such hypocrisy!”

“I didn’t mean to pretend to be religious—I only wanted to please Jake,” stammered Kate, with burning cheeks.

“To please Jacob? And what, pray, would you call your conduct, you who are growing old enough to be confirmed, like some of your classmates, whose example you would do well to imitate in all things,” cried Miss Clive, with a sweeping gesture, as she rose and stood erect in her favorite magisterial attitude. “What can you call such conduct but hypocrisy?”

Oh, Miss Clive, Miss Clive—if you only knew the harm you are doing now! Kate has faults in plenty, but hypocrisy, as you well know in cooler moments, is not among them, and the biting, cruel, sarcastic speech you are now continuing in blind anger will sink into her soul and rankle there for years, rising up like a stumbling-block because your words seem to bar the way to all future efforts by branding them with the name of deceit. You need not fancy

now that Kate will ever come to you for guidance, or let you catch one glimpse of her inner life. Small comfort is it to her that you soon include Verena and others in your condemnation—she hears only those bitter words aimed at herself. Mrs. Hill, utterly worn out, summons a class of elder girls and leaves the room. Elisabeth Armstrong walks away, looking back upon her sister with that same cold, haughty glance of scorn with which she has listened to the disclosures of this unlucky morning. Agnes reluctantly follows, to the silent despair of Brownie, who feels forsaken, too well aware that her impulsive confession of the first mischief to Agnes has indirectly caused this trouble, and feeling herself branded as a “tell-tale” henceforth. Madame Verrier and Miss Dorinda (who, it must be said, had felt much for the unhappy wrongdoers) soon depart. Bessie Johnson, full of unavailing sympathy for all whom she has unintentionally brought into trouble, is dismissed by Almira, who presently goes out in high dudgeon at some very pointed allusions from Miss Clive to what she considers the poor Dragon’s own share in the matter. Lastly, poor old Jake, muttering some incoherent apologies for the offence he still but dimly comprehends, but for which Miss Clive shows no desire to spare him, follows in Almira’s wake, with bowed head and uncertain footsteps.

Miss Clive, wholly carried away by wrath, while fancying herself animated only by a wish to administer the purest justice, continues to harangue her four remaining victims, Fanny and Sophie having been released. Seated in mouselike stillness at their desks, they watch their miserable comrades standing in a forlorn row before the dreadful chair of authority, their hearts, even the careless Cornie's, and the defiant Hungarian's, sinking more than ever, now that the long school-room is almost deserted, and no eager crowd of, for the most part, sympathizing spectators waits to learn their fate.

When they were finally released, Kate rushed upstairs to her alcove and hid the locket out of sight. She could not bear to look at it, but flung herself on her bed and indulged in a wild fit of sobbing, which, whatever may be said as to its injurious effects on mind or body by those Edgeworthian moralists who demand of youth, "What good will it do you to cry?" relieved and soothed her overwrought nerves as nothing else could have done. After all, there was comfort in having nothing more to hide, and, though the ringleader, Kate's punishment was not more severe than that of her companions, who cheered and consoled her when she reappeared below, where Verena was edifying a chosen band of Thistles by displaying the grewsome face

she had drawn for the schoolmarm and relating very dramatic anecdotes of sundry scrapes wherein she had taken active part at her seminaries abroad.

Well—they had been punished, as Kate afterwards observed to Vcrena in private, not so much because they had really done the mischief, but because they had tried to undo it—“Thanks to Agnes and her morbid, ridiculous fussiness!” burst out the Hungarian, while her eyes flashed and her nervous little hands quivered in wild, graceful gestures. “Oh, yes, Kate; you needn’t try to defend her! You know well enough that, as Cornie and I said at first, if we had only had the sense to let the whole thing alone no one would ever have known we made the schoolmarm, and we would have had no second going up there, and your locket wouldn’t have dropped off your neck as you reached up to rub out your rhymes on the black-board. I think that sacrificing other persons in order to satisfy one’s own precious conscience might be called a selfish, wicked way of being good—and that letting us alone would have been a virtuous way of being wicked—and the better way of the two!”

Kate groaned in sympathy, trying to soothe her friend; but the fiery Magyar refused to be pacified. Moreover, Kate’s own worst blowing-up, as we know, had arisen directly in con-

sequence of her one virtuous deed on that memorable Sunday in reciting hymns to old Jake. Wherefore, the conclusion soon arrived at by the precocious wits of these two Thistles was that, though not always sure to be punished for being naughty, they were likely to be somehow punished, and severely, for any unusual efforts to be good. As Verena, abetted by "Foxey," phrased it, one was always far safer, at school anyhow, for taking care not to be caught in committing any special acts of virtue worth being punished for.

Miss Clive's injudicious fondness for doing everything in sight of the whole school had lent the whole affair a sort of dramatic interest very exciting to all the chief actors therein; and Kate, as her spirits rose, declared that this eventful day ought to be called the "Day of the Platform," just as the nuns of Port Royal spoke of a certain crisis in their convent history as the "Day of the Wicket Gate."

But nobody, except Verena, understood the allusion, and "Foxey" raised a laugh by solemnly suggesting that the nuns' designation, if adapted to what the Thistles called the "Grand Court Martial," merely required the alteration of two letters to transform it into the "Day of the Wicked Kate," which would be most highly appropriate.

Meanwhile they remained, as Verena said,

“under martial law,” frowned upon by the still implacable “General,” and afraid of compromising themselves anew. Agnes Leslie and poor little Brownie they continued to avoid. Elisabeth Armstrong, with her usual want of tact, undertook to treat her Thistle of a sister to a severe private lecture, which was speedily cut short by the culprit suddenly darting out of the low open window of the class-room where it was administered during recess, and seeking a cat-like and inviolable sanctuary up among the topmost branches of a spreading pine. But the worst was over, and no threats issued of keeping them out of the theatricals, so that even Kate’s sadness did not last many days, except when she, of course, was caught and teased by Julia & Co., and when the memory of Miss Clive’s hard, cruel words returned to flood her heart with silent bitterness.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNCERTAINTY.

“**A**RITHMETIC, as I always say, is just a branch of the Black Art; but it does seem extra-diabolical on a heavenly May day like this!” growled Kate, as she and her fellow-culprits dolefully sat down at their desks, while the others were still enjoying recess out of doors. “I only want to dream, and waste my precious time, and scribble on my slate, instead of ‘Extracting the Square Root.’ What spirited figures you draw, Verena; how I envy you the gift. I think an artistic hobby has an advantage over a musical one, because you can practice it without disturbing anybody and proclaiming your blunders aloud” (“Ah!” interrupted Cornie, with an expressive sigh), “and I’m sure it must be a far less anxious, nervous sort of thing than writing, for then you feel as if you were giving up just so much of your own inner self ‘for the daws to peck at.’ Here comes the Dragon—stop!”

The Hungarian, unheeding, and inspired by sympathy, was covering her slate with an orig-

inal design representing Miss Clive, her high, handsome features and martial bearing much caricatured, enthroned in a lofty dentist's chair, about to have a large molar removed by the gigantic forceps of a most grewsome practitioner, while a crowd of the wildest Thistles stood looking on, with huge scrolls, bearing sundry sarcastic observations on her woeful plight, issuing from their grinning mouths.

Cornie's spasmodic chuckle as she peeped over Verena's shoulder aroused Miss Almira's attention, and she gravely ordered Verena to come forward with her slate at once.

"Rub it out!" whispered Cornie; but the artist shook her head, and, marching up, presented the *corpus delicti* with undaunted coolness.

Poor Miss Almira, in the empty school-room, allowed herself to enjoy the foolish jest with, perhaps, a slight feeling of secret pleasure at thus seeing her tormentor absurdly turned into ridicule. She struggled hard to suppress a smile, and, after gazing long upon the sketch, headed in large letters "Extraction of the Square Root," quietly rubbed out the whole and handed the slate to its owner, with a faint rebuke for allowing her artistic talent to waste itself in such silly nonsense.

"More luck than management that you got off so easily!" whispered Kate as her friend

came back. "You had better mind what I tell you every day about keeping out of hot water, for Madame will soon be choosing the play, and I tremble lest we should be crowded out."

Ah, Kate!—well for you that you had not the second sight to discern a scene that was passing out in the garden just then!

WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THE GARDEN.

"Nonsense, girls! Wait till Julia comes. She'll tell us what to do."

Cecilia Morgan had hardly uttered these words as she sat with her friends in the summer house before Julia Maxwell's tall, thin form and sharp, rather handsome face appeared, as she bounded into their midst, exclaiming, "I've found it out! I got hold of Madame, and coaxed it out of her. The rest won't be told till to-morrow, so we have time. Look!"

She flung a large volume on the table and opened it, while the girls crowded round to read the title of the play which had been chosen.

"Plenty of good parts for us," went on Julia, "and I got on the blind side of Madame, and she's ready to give us our choice. But about the children's rôles: only three—and, of course, she'll be wanting to drag that horrid little conceited yellow-wigged Armstrong in again."

“That’s just it!” Cecilia broke in eagerly. “We were all saying we would move heaven, and earth, and Miss Clive in order to keep her out.”

“Agreed!” nodded Julia. “That wild little Magyar looks as if she might act well; but she would be wanting to have Kate and Brownie, and we’re determined to get rid of the whole set. Girls, listen! If we are idiots enough to tell Madame that we don’t want those children, she will remonstrate and beg us to be obliging, and so forth. We must privately choose whom we like—Rose Gordon, and Christine Ellis, and Clara Barker—and get hold of them, and talk about it till they set their hearts on it; and then poor, polite Madame won’t have the courage to refuse.”

Cecilia threw back her head with an air of relief, while a smile of malicious glee overspread her somewhat languid but pretty face.

“Glorious! You’re a general! What did these girls propose just now but that we should get hold of Queen Bess and gently insinuate that her majesty should exert her influence to open Madame’s eyes to the fact that Mademoiselle Kate had better be kept out of the distraction of theatricals and obliged to attend only to her studies. As if she would condescend to take a hint from any of us.”

“As if you, or I, or anyone could make an

impression on an Armstrong," broke in Julia, with derisive mirth. "The whole family need taking down! My father was at college with the father and uncle of these girls, and he often says that such a pair of utterly insufferable, conceited, stuck-up young prigs were never seen, and that their classmates turned 'Armstrong Arrogance' into a proverb, because they were a couple of what Dickens calls 'turn-up-nosed peacocks.' I tell you, girls, it won't do to have the younger generation crowing over us. Bess is going away next autumn—I wish it were summer!—so she can't worry us long. But this detestable little mite of a Katharine, whom Madame thrusts into every play and Frau Schulze pets and praises, is growing more intolerable every day, and I just intend to put her down somehow!"

A general laugh of approbation greeted this decision; and Julia, much elated, proceeded to detail her scheme, dwelling so forcibly on the necessity of using the younger children for this purpose that some of her accomplices, touched by a faint prick of conscience, interrupted her to insist that none of the little girls employed for the sake of keeping out Kate and others should be informed of this crooked diplomacy.

"Oh, of course!" said Julia carelessly, "I know better than to harm their youthful minds, to say nothing of our own prospects, by telling

them of our wire-pulling—but, Cissy, you know well enough that when I undertake a thing I put it through. Here's the play—and the part of a high-born French lady that will just suit you. I mean to be the tragic, wicked female, and, in order to prepare for it, I shall set about securing those children by fascinating them with the idea of acting at once."

"It will be a pleasure to have that spirited little Rose Gordon, with her clear-cut features, and short, dark, curly hair, to dress up for a page instead of that horrid Kate, with her frizzly yellow pate, or the Hungarian, who looks as if she might stab you, or that tiresome Brownie, who seems taken out of a Sunday-school book, with no character of her own except to run and tell on other girls after she has helped them to do something atrocious," remarked Cecilia, while her friends assented in chorus as the meeting adjourned.

DISAPPOINTMENT AND A DANCE.

Julia, who had a great amount of energy, set about her work with such skill, vigor and promptitude that within twenty-four hours her point was gained. Madame Verrier, after giving out the name of the intended drama and arranging for a first rehearsal, summoned the thunderstricken Kate to a private interview, and, not without genuine regret, informed her

that several of the youngest girls had so set their hearts upon appearing that all juvenile rôles would be filled, so that Kate and "*Cette charmante petite Hongroise*" must content themselves with standing in some of the *tableaux vivants* which would probably conclude the performance. Kate, choking down her tears, but heroically trying to fancy that she bewailed this exclusion for Verena's sake, rather than her own, begged Madame to devise some trifling character for her friend, expatiating upon Verena's grace, beauty and evident dramatic power; but Madame, after some hesitation, reluctantly declared that Mademoiselle Forster, though a fluent French scholar, had, strange to say, an accent, probably somewhat German, which was scarcely pure enough to display on the coming occasion.

Against this sentence there was no appeal, and Kate, full of unspeakable disappointment, yet unable to feel slightly relieved at having Verena for a companion in misfortune, mournfully slunk away; while Madame, sympathizing, but glad to have the interview over, began to turn out her store of stage costumes from a large wardrobe, and the actresses-expectant came in, full of spirits. Kate could not bear to witness these preparations or to encounter Julia & Co., whom she shrewdly suspected of unfair conduct; and, ten minutes later, the

afternoon sunshine was streaming upon two small, disconsolate maidens running at full speed towards their own private refuge among the tall asparagus bushes beside the fence of the vegetable garden, eager to indulge in the "luxury of woe."

Verena, who had a strange fondness for going bareheaded, had flung her large hat over her left shoulder, where it hung like a shield, Kate thought, instinctively reminded of some German picture of a warrior maiden in a fairy tale by the graceful, exquisitely formed creature bounding at her side. Verena's countenance, vexed and disappointed though she was, seemed now more childlike and serene than when Kate had first met her; the heavy fringe of black hair formerly concealing her forehead had long since, at Miss Clive's command, been turned smoothly back with a comb, while the rich mass still rippled far below her shoulders, and her face, relieved from the low-drooping shade, had lost much of the wild, anxious expression which had marked it while she lived unhappily in her brother's house, and gained in beauty and intellectuality now that the fine, open brow was hidden no longer.

Kate's eyes seemed ready to overflow with tears as she flung herself down among the feathery bushes that likewise engulfed the prostrate form of her companion, crying, "I

feel just like boiling over! Of course, we oughtn't to care! Agnes would preach at us about it being our duty to be willing to give up to the little ones—but it doesn't comfort us. It's pure moonshine, like the everlasting talk about self-sacrifice making one so happy. We sacrificed ourselves and our judgment to Agnes' notions—and a fine mess we got into! I'm so glad Mrs. Hill blamed her well for making us undo our mischief in that sly, silly way—and Brownie is never seen by Julia & Co. without their yelling 'Telltale!' after her till she nearly cries."

"Serves her right!" growled Verena, "and she is crowded out, too."

"Oh, but she doesn't mind it as we do! She's never enthusiastic or excited; there's no need of pitying her. But I do wish we could have a really good play to act," went on Kate, insensibly brightening over her favorite topic. "Something grand or beautiful, not just wishy-washy stuff written '*pour les jeunes demoiselles*,' but, you see, all the real dramas are full of men's rôles, and, though the General allows us small ones to dress as boys, or the seniors to act Grand Turks, in flowing robes, she would be horrified at the idea of the elder girls arrayed as 'the opposite sex.' "

"What a pity we can't ask Frau Schulze to make the Professor send over a few well-

behaved pupils to act the male characters," laughed Verena. "Only fancy the General's countenance at the bare suggestion!"

"Yes; her face would be graver than it was one evening when I got some Thistles to steal out into the hall and try that extraordinary Greek dance that we have seen pictures of. You stand in a row, with your right hand on the shoulder of the one in front, and your left holding up your neighbor's left foot, while your own is held by the person behind—and away you go, with a sort of hop, skip and jump. It wasn't easy, and we laughed so that we nearly dropped. Suddenly the parlor door opened, and there stood the General, looking unutterable things, so that even Cornie was scared and flopped down at her feet. Tell me something about Europe, and Hungary, and your schools—anything for a variety!"

Verena laughed, rather bitterly, but began a series of what to Kate seemed most enchanting reminiscences of her childhood. She was a good narrator, and soon waxed eloquent in describing her birthplace, Buda-Pest, the shores of the Danube, and her summers in the country, till her eager listener could almost see the fertile Hungarian plains stretching away to meet the Carpathians, and the lonely, grass-covered *Pùsztas*, with the storks flying overhead at the return of spring. The strange-

sounding Magyar names, the anecdotes of foreign customs, of Verena's beautiful Hungarian mother, and of her twin-brother, all seemed to Kate like a fairy tale. She hearkened with irrepressible sighs of admiration that ludicrously reminded her of Jake's groanings while she recited hymns; and when Verena told her how, when she was five years old, one of her father's friends, a sculptor, had insisted upon being allowed to model herself and her brother Ladislaus as the Infant Diana and Apollo, she burst out:

"You always seemed to get such beautiful, romantic things into your life, such as never happen to anybody here! Where are the statues now?"

"I believe the artist made several copies in marble for sale. He had presented one to us, but my father had to travel on business, and it remained in the studio. I will show you a photograph of it when we go in. How well I remember it all; and I always used to want to linger and dabble in the sculptor's clay, and I love the moist, clayey smell of a studio now," added Verena, in a melancholy tone which rather surprised Kate, who, recalling her own sombre, bookish early childhood, wondered that her friend should not seem to rejoice more in the memory of what, to herself, appeared the most delightful of infantine distinctions, and

began to crave yet more recollections as they sat hidden among the overshadowing bushes, catching broken glimpses of the blue afternoon sky between the feathery tops, the hum of insects mingling with Verena's deep, rich voice as she went on to tell about her friendship with the Fleming girls, whose half-German, half-English mother was a distant cousin of her own.

"That's another poem!" broke in Kate. "Such beauties—ideal blondes, with artistic talent and fine voices—oh, how I envy them! It is too delightful to think that Margarethe is called Iduna at home because she looks like some statue of Iduna, the wife of the Scandinavian god of poetry, who keeps the golden apples, which the gods eat in order to renew their youth. Such a lovely allegory of the power of poetry—but you and I are about the only girls here, except Grace Howard, who could possibly understand it—Fanny might, but she would be sure to laugh at it."

"They don't want poetry—they want fun!" said Verena decidedly. "I know better than to expect anyone but you to care for these things. And Frederica is called Freya, after the Scandinavian goddess of the spring. Oh!—I ought to have been left to the guardianship of Mr. Fleming instead of to my brother's. We expected it—it was a shock to find that I must be sent over here, to be so wretched, until I came to school"——

Her voice faltered, and she only escaped from sobbing by breaking away into another subject, making Kate laugh again by tales of her life at the Moravian school in Germany, and then at a large seminary in Hungary until she was nearly thirteen.

“You have had more real troubles than I!” exclaimed Kate at last, lying back upon the dry grass and gazing up into the sky, “but you seem to have had just ten times more brightness, and beauty, and poetry in your life to make up for it; so I can’t help envying you.”

Verena’s dark eyebrows contracted and her lips quivered.

“You are not dependent on your half-brother. You say you will be comfortably off, though, like me, you won’t be rich. I wouldn’t despair. Some day you will be able to go back to your friends and lead the sort of life that you seem intended for.”

Verena made no reply, but, starting from her shady lair, suddenly ran away, followed by Kate, as though seeking to throw off her haunting sadness by speeding rapidly along until she gained a smooth plot of grass encircled by seven majestic cedars, remote from the house.

“Stand over yonder, facing me!” she cried. “I will teach you something.”

Kate, laughing, took her station opposite.

“You shall learn the *Csardàs*—the national

dance of my own beloved Hungary," she went on, spreading out her graceful arms and raising her spirited head, as though listening to music. "You know, we Hungarians say it is meant to symbolize a wooing—I will be the lover, and dance up to you, seeking favor, which you may grant me or refuse—it is all dramatic; you must think you are on the stage and musn't be shy. First, you must learn to pronounce it *Shardàsh*—and then try to fancy yourself a Hungarian girl, among the scenes I have been describing, and think of me as a fine young Magyar, with quick, dark eyes and black moustache, at some festival in our national costume, with a richly furred, braided coat and cap with long aigrette, and a curved sabre, and jingling spurs"——

"It is much easier to fancy you such a cavalier than to think of me as a girl whom he would be likely to care about!" sighed Kate, a wistful look of melancholy sweeping swiftly across her face. "Well, my handsome young knight—you are probably the only one I shall ever have at my feet; so let me make the most of you—I am ready."

Verena, glancing round to see that they were unobserved among the spreading cedars, began to hum a strange tune, wild, gay and passionate, as she raised her arms and danced lightly to and fro, now assuming the part of the ardent

youth, and then that of a bashful or coquettish girl until, fancying her admiring partner sufficiently instructed to begin, she darted towards Kate, who, scarcely knowing what to do, made a few uncertain steps away from her, and suddenly stopped short, laughing, blushing and nervously twisting her small hands.

“Kate, Kate!” laughed Verena, standing still, the short skirt of her gray linen dress fluttering round her knees, above her beautiful limbs and long red stockings, as her whole tiny form swayed with undulating, graceful motion, sweeping back her dark, rich hair, and quivering to the tips of her fingers. “You are no coquette! You don’t enter into the spirit of the *Csardàs* at all. And oh! what a shy, hard girl you would be for any man to woo. You would never see when anyone liked you—you would keep holding off, and running away, and being afraid of misunderstanding him, and of going too far, until he would have to back out for sheer lack of encouragement.”

“Well,” answered Kate, half-pleased, half-vexed at this home thrust, “you said it must all be dramatic. I never had to act a coquette in my life, and don’t pretend to know anything about it, except that you must not be so undramatic as to expect me to rush into your arms at once.”

Her face flushed into momentary girlish prettiness as, catching the spirit of the *Csardàs* by

degrees, she skilfully darted to and fro, avoiding her eagerly pursuing partner with more mirth and zest than Verena had ever dreamed could be displayed by the shy Kate, who, gradually ceasing her first movements of repulsion, now glanced towards her with smiling looks of encouragement. Verena smiled and danced more quickly after her; but Kate had again turned aside, renewing a glimpse of favor only to withdraw it. Round and round they sped in the deep cedar shadows on the grass, the late sunlight striking the dark, pointed tops. Kate was growing sufficiently at home in the strange dance to satisfy her friend, who suddenly sank on one knee before her, with upturned beseeching eyes, and dropped, outstretched, supplicating hands.

Smiling and somewhat blushing, Kate seized Verena's right hand, and the next moment the dark and golden locks were blown together as the two girls whirled round and round, Kate's waist encircled by Verena's slight, firm arm until they paused, breathless.

"You have danced away your melancholy?" said Verena, keenly eyeing her companion's sparkling face as, suddenly withdrawing from her partner's grasp, she ran up to one of the great cedars and stood looking into its dark shade, half-hidden by the branches trailing on the ground.

Kate smiled and nodded eagerly.

“I have a new idea—an inspiration from your dance,” she replied joyously, with her thoughts already far away from the *Csardàs*. “You shall know it in time, but don’t ask me any more now.”

Verena also nodded, with an air of mystery, as, again dropping on one knee before Kate, she burst out into a Hungarian sentence which, stripped of some of its native flowery idiom, and rendered into English, might sound something like this:

“There is one thing that I must say to my lady-love and apt pupil—that, whatever she may say, or fancy in her own shy heart—she is no high, unearthly prophetess, or philosopher, or Valkyria-maiden, who cares nothing for the things of common mortals—no—her obedient knight has found her to be responsive to the magic of our *Csardàs* at last.”

With which oracular, though uncomprehended speech, that seemed doubly ludicrous from one small atom of girlhood to another, the young Magyar, softly laughing, turned away and ran in search of Fanny Fox; while Kate, pleased, puzzled, wondering what those rippling foreign sounds might mean, but absorbed in her own fancies, lingered on alone among the cedars, nestling beneath their odorous, drooping boughs, and drinking in wild visions with their pure, strengthening fragrance till the bell rang to call her homewards.

CHAPTER IX.

PLANS AND PLAYS.

“**W**HERE is our golden-haired friend who calls herself the Sunflower?” asked Verena of Fanny, in recess, concerning Kate, who, like all the Thistles, bore a cognomen for private use. “She was grieving yesterday about the acting, but this morning she was brimming over with spirits.”

“I saw her running after Frau Schulze, so it can’t be any very bad mischief,” answered “Foxey,” adding playful surmises as to what the “Sunflower” might have in prospect; but even her shrewdness did not suspect that Kate’s energies were busily maturing a grand scheme which should gratify their dramatic longings and set their enemies at naught.

Her sudden inspiration during the *Csardàs* had been—What if Mrs. Hill could be persuaded to allow a second play, in German, where Verena’s accent would be her glory, and the Thistles could have it all to suit themselves. She resolved, however, to proceed with caution, consulting only Frau Schulze, whom she contrived, not without difficulty, to see alone. The

good-natured woman entered into the plan with German enthusiasm and childlike eagerness, promising to try to procure a short drama suited to the occasion and the somewhat limited number of actresses strong enough in *Deutsch* to undertake it. Kate fairly hugged the kindly Frau, and ran away to where Verena, still rather downcast, sat alone in the arbor, turning over one of Madame's books of plays that had been left there, with a doleful visage that nearly put Kate's resolutions of secrecy to flight.

"Dear girls, don't mind it!" she exclaimed, flinging herself on the seat. "We'll have tableaux, or *something*, and a good time yet. One comfort, it is just the stupidest play in the book this year, so we don't lose much. Oh! you were reading the 'Captives of Missolonghi,' all about modern Greeks fighting the Turks. It's frightfully heavy, full of French bombast, but we had a charming time with it three years ago. I would rather act in something wild, and foolish, and melodramatic, with national costumes, and tableaux, and singing, and getting killed, and lying dead on the stage, than in anything commonplace and sensible, wouldn't you? Madame's lady friend, who amused herself when she boarded at a convent by writing these plays for the pupils, doesn't bother herself with French classical traditions, for she kills us off whenever she chooses. It's perfectly heavenly to lie dead on the stage'"——

“Yes; but I would prefer dancing, or singing, or doing something.”

“Oh, yes; my ideal of a perfect rôle would be one like Julius Caesar’s, where one is by turns a hero, a corpse, and a ghost,” said Kate, with an air of experience. “And I can’t help envying that actor who was so absorbed in his part that he stabbed himself in earnest—and then had the courage to raise himself up and utter his ‘last words.’ That’s what I call splendid, a genuine dying in harness. But there’s nothing so delicious as a ridiculous tragedy, and the audience seemed to enjoy those ‘Captives’ as much as we did. And I did feel so perfectly happy, acting a little Greek boy, whose father had been killed in battle, and having to spout pompous verses about our native Hellas. There was an allusion to some great, heroic poet-stranger, who had given his life for Greece—of course, it was Byron—and though the lines weren’t worthy of the subject, I was in ecstasy at having to roll them off, especially as Herr Schulze started a clapping that spread through the audience. And Virginia Leslie was my brother, and we both got killed, with ever so many more, and had to lie dead on the stage while the rest spouted verses and”——

“Perfectly lovely; but are there no comedies in this book?”

“Oh, yes; plenty; but they are worse than the tragedies, just commonplace, heavy stuff. I hate to see the curtain rise on a room scene, with people in nineteenth-century clothes. I feel swindled; I would rather have the wildest bosh of a romantic drama, with stage effects, than any farce, or comedy, or society play that I have ever seen yet.”

Kate was provokingly good and studious that evening. Verena, being of a most mercurial temperament, soon cast off her sadness so far as to indulge in sundry whispered comments upon Miss Clive's dramatic way of reading prayers to her friend, who, sorely afraid lest she might do something to mar their prospects, affected an utter deafness and blindness to Verena's antics, causing both Fanny and the Hungarian to rally her about “having a good fit,” and asking her, as they went upstairs, whether she had been spouting any more hymns for old Jake. Kate bore the teasing with a calmness which only made them redouble it—but, fully preoccupied with her own plans, nothing they might say could vex her now.

Frau Schulze found it no easy matter to fulfill her promise; for, among all the German plays examined, not one proved to be what was wanted, and, after several days of vain efforts to satisfy her own and Kate's critical tastes, she acknowledged herself to be obliged to give it up.

This, however, was no great blow to Kate, who had all the time been imagining what the wished-for drama ought to be, until she found herself inventing the faint shadow of a plot and putting the lines together. The whole childish, fragmentary thing was already so far shaped in her own mind that it was almost with relief that she heard of the Frau's ill success, and nervously, with many blushes, confessed that she thought herself able to write a short play, in prose, if Frau Schulze would correct the German and if Mrs. Hill would let them act it, and allow none of Julia's set to interfere. Frau Schulze, much surprised, after some deliberation consented to go with her nervous pupil to seek the required permission, secretly somewhat doubting whether it would be won. Kate grew so frightened that she fully expected as curt a refusal as Mrs. Hill was ever known to give; but the latter, naturally gentle, and pitying the child's distress, gave a conditional consent, depending upon the merits of the play and of its authoress, which raised the mercurial spirits of the latter to the seventh heaven of delight and gratitude.

Profound secrecy was, as yet, to be observed towards all except those whom Kate had chosen for the troupe of her simple drama, the outlines whereof she now began to explain to Mrs. Hill and the much-interested Frau, who

gladly consented to be stage manager. Grace, Agnes, Verena, Fanny and several others were that evening summoned by Miss Dorinda to a private conference in Mrs. Hill's study, where Miss Clive (whom the Frau, before her departure, had contrived to win over to most sanguine wishes for the success of the piece) with her usual dignity announced the proposed novelty to her astonished audience, while poor Kate, crouching in her seat, looked ready to sink beneath the gaze of their wondering eyes.

"Remember," Miss Clive went on abruptly, "that none of you are to utter a word in school concerning this. Another thing I also wish to impress upon you. This play is to be the sole production of Katharine Armstrong. You are not to annoy her by making suggestions. Grace, who is the head pupil in German among the seniors, and Verena, who has a birthright to that language, may be permitted to assist her, should she desire it; but no one else. I myself will aid Frau Schulze in revising it when it shall be finished. Katharine, I must again remind you that this composition must not be suffered to interfere with your ordinary studies. You shall be given extra time by being excused from your music, and dancing, and from Frau Schulze's classes. You are aware, of course, how much will now depend upon your general conduct? I shall be observant of you. That is all. You may go."

Quietly leaving this august presence, the astonished stage troupe, on their way back to parlor or school-room, burst into eager comments of pleasure or surprise. Verena, suddenly roused from her dejection, showed her vehement delight by valiantly protecting Kate from annoyance at the hands of the excited girls, who beset her with innumerable questions; while "Foxey," though in reality ready to serve as her warmest coadjutor, began rallying her until the poor little would-be dramatist, seeking privacy, slipped into the vacant seat beside Grace Howard. Fanny and the rest took their places, but Cornie, usually passing her evenings in study, now that examination was approaching, began with unwonted curiosity, "Don't try to put me off. I know something is up; just look at Kate!"

"Hush! nothing is wrong," Verena whispered hurriedly. "You have a bad conscience, I suppose, and fancy how the General has discovered you put a certain fine, big odoriferous onion inside of Madame's crochet-bag three weeks ago, and it lay there, scenting her work for five days, till she shook out her bag in the parlor one evening, and the vegetable bounced down on the floor, and we all knew who had done it, and had to feign ignorance, and bear a storm of French wrath that should have fallen on your evil head."

Cornie's spasmodic chuckle, fortunately for her two companions, who wanted to be rid of her, brought down a rebuke from Miss Almira and a peremptory summons to take her books and seat herself apart from the others. Silence followed, but Fanny and Verena, while copying off their next compositions, could not refrain from exchanging whispers, as they glanced over to where Kate sat, musing and scribbling, while Grace wrote at her side.

"Compare those two," began Foxey. "Grace works away at her valedictory, and gets on, and makes no fuss; but poor Kate is nearly frantic already. Of course you know; what is it to be?"

"I don't know, and wouldn't tell you if I did," muttered Verena, secretly quivering with eagerness. "I'll trust her to make it good."

"Don't fidget so; the Dragon's eye is on you now. Of course I won't worry her. She'll have worry enough; but I hope she won't give me any high-flown, tragic part to spout, for I should giggle."

"Nonsense, the General said it mustn't be anything tragic," answered Verena, inwardly certain that Kate's imagination would run away into a romantic vein. "Something melodramatic, and full of effects, I suppose."

"There's nothing that Kate adores so much as something romantic and full of effects,"

Fanny resumed, with an earnestness which soothed Verena's rising wrath. "When she first came here she loved to set the little ones to act things out of allegories and fairy tales. Once she and Virginia Leslie were missing, and the General sent some of us to find them. We heard a dismal tooting from a tin horn, far down the garden, and there was Virginia, with a wreath of wild carrot flowers on her pretty curls, sitting under a tree, blowing the whistle, and pretending to be the good little Minna, in 'The Distant Hills,' playing on her flute. She jumped up and ran off to where Kate was lying, eyes shut, and hair all in disorder, close to the wall, in imitation of the naughty little Rhoda—who woke up, greatly abashed. And, another day, the General met her heading a troop, whom she had persuaded to try to act the 'Shadow of the Cross.' They had managed to put on night-gowns over their frocks, and had parted their hair, and tied black bands round their foreheads, like the girls in those old-fashioned illustrations—and were marching, holding up little crosses made out of rough sticks tied together. You may fancy the effect of the procession, especially as Kate was trying to induce them to do it more thoroughly by taking off their shoes and stockings, but they wouldn't. Miss Clive was horrified, especially as Kate had no idea of being irreverent, and was quite thunder-

struck at being scolded and made responsible for all the others, who, of course, were glad to cast all the blame on her. I ought to add that Virginia was upstairs with a cold, so Kate had no guardian angel that afternoon. I always say she runs the church and stage into each other, for she adores a jumble of the dramatic with the serious. Why, when she was christened"——

"Christened?" Verena repeated, forgetting her safe rôle of indifference and gazing eagerly into Fanny's fine dark eyes. "What? Here?"

"Hush! speak lower. This was the way of it. Kate arrived here when she was just nine, soon after her father died; her mother had died when Bess came, three years before. Kate and Virginia were admitted as a favor, under the usual age of ten. I was ten and a newcomer, but could take care of myself. Well, very soon it came out that Kate not only did not know her catechism, but had never been baptized; her parents didn't make much of her; they preferred Elisabeth, and a boy who died. You may fancy the feelings of our General, who instantly wrote to Kate's guardians for permission to have her baptized at once. Her uncle, of course, gave his leave, in a lofty, indifferent sort of way; and her aunt, though she was quite willing to be considered a godmother, begged Miss Clive to act as her deputy. Mrs.

Leslie, who had run down to visit her girls and liked Kate, offered to be one godmother, and the General stood as proxy for Mrs. Armstrong. We couldn't raise a godfather for her at this most feminine and nunlike establishment, so what did they do but ask Herr Schulze to undertake the office. He's a Lutheran, but he came, and insisted upon believing he was meant to represent Kate's uncle—we had some trouble to make him understand, though he was quite willing to assume the responsibility. He made a very dignified appearance, and has been uncommonly paternal to Kate ever since. The Frau came, too; and altogether there was a good deal of talk about the whole thing. But you should have seen how Kate enjoyed it all. She behaved very properly; but we could tell what an immense delight it was to the poor child to be suddenly made the center of importance by several older persons, after being an Ugly Duckling for so long at home."

"And so she was christened?" said Verena, who had stopped writing and was listening with a repressed interest which urged Fanny to go on.

"Yes; one fine Sunday afternoon in May, by Dr. Grimshaw's young predecessor, who was called to a big city parish soon after. Seven children were baptized, and she was the smallest, though some were younger than herself.

Miss Clive had had Kate's hair all crimped till it stood out like a sort of aureole; I never saw her look so pretty as she did then, in her white frock—and she behaved most beautifully for a long time, for she had Virginia to help her find pleasure in being good. More than we can say of you; why don't you vary the situation by a little virtue now and then? Look, how she writes and scratches out!"

Kate's brain, meanwhile, was in a perplexed, but joyous whirl of fancies. It was well, Grace Howard thought, that she must be restrained by the smallness of her troupe and by the various scenic difficulties from attempting too wild a flight for her "Donkey on Parnassus," as she called her would-be Pegasus, after a magazine article she had read, wherein certain very small poets were playfully described as "donkey-riders" on the sacred mount. Grace, taking advantage of Miss Almira's absence, crossed over to Verena's desk to discover the reason of her smothered bursts of laughter with Fanny, fearing that they might be planning some silly joke. Verena had illustrated the situation by a large and very spirited pencil sketch, wherein Kate, her long locks streaming, sat upon the back of a winged donkey, madly careering aloft through space; while Fanny was whispering, "Why didn't you make the poor donkey painfully plodding round the

foot of Parnassus, with drooping ears and wings, through a muddy labyrinth marked 'German Construction,' and poor Kate, nearly dropping off his back, staring at her rugged path among huge boulders labeled 'Particles' and 'Separable Verbs,' 'Government of Prepositions,' and so forth. And, far above, you should have shown the top of Parnassus with the genuine Pegasus, at an unattainable distance to Kate's long-eared steed. That would be 'realism,' Grace, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," said Grace, "but your realism doesn't express Kate's present condition half so well as Verena's triumphant donkey, bearing her aloft into the clouds"——

" 'With a host of furious fancies
Whereof she is commander,' "——

broke in Verena, viewing her sketch with satisfaction. "It's the way to be happy. But, oh! I can't quite catch that appealing expression in a donkey's eye which is so fascinating"——

"Thistles and donkeys are naturally supposed to have an affinity for each other," said Fanny. "As for Kate, she's happy, with her head full of

" 'Forests, and enchantments drear,
Where more is meant than meets the ear,'

and I wouldn't tease her now for the world. Only I know that her play will be sure to be too

poetical, for she breathes in that element unless she happens to be running after something ridiculous. And she'll be certain to make her characters talk pure Katharine Gordon Armstrong and nothing else. It's a fine, strong, spirited name, though she's such an over-romantic girl that I don't see how she ever can be very happy."

"Her happiness, as Verena says, is to be found in imaginative things," said Grace, with a sigh. "Kate is too much of an idealist for her own good; but we may be sure of one thing—she won't give us any lovesick stuff to spout, whatever else she may do."

"Of course not," said Verena merrily, as she went on drawing. "She's more likely to set us raving about ghosts, and gnomes, and elves, and so forth. There; I've put in a crescent moon, and stars, and a comet, with some fine big bats and horned owls flying about. So you may give her my sketch, Grace, with my compliments, before the Dragon comes back."

CHAPTER X.

SUSPENSE.

EXCITEMENT, however exhilarating, soon began to tell upon Kate's sensitive nerves and over-active brain. Her sleep grew broken; the silence and darkness round her made her more wakeful than light or music. She often wished that the mild, calm night, with the waning moon rising yonder and sending her pale shaft of light through the open end-window would last unbroken, with its soft breeze rustling the leaves in the garden and stirring her own fancies anew, until she had had time to shape and to write down all that floated so clearly before her in the still darkness. She slept at last from exhaustion, and awoke feeling as matter-of-fact as Cornie herself. Miss Clive detected languor in her face, and, fearing that she had been allowed to undertake too much, suddenly relaxed her rules, excusing Kate from certain studies hitherto insisted upon until her work should be finished. Kate's outburst of spirits at this news served to set her fancy into fresh activity, and sustained her amid the manifold annoyances she

underwent from the questioning of Cornie and others, who marveled exceedingly that Kate should be excused from so many lessons and spend so much time in Grace Howard's room, whither she betook herself, by invitation, to escape disturbance and be able to taste the solitude she enjoyed.

"Kate is nearly through and I'm thankful," whispered Grace to Fanny one evening, in the school-room. "She says she would like to hang over it, altering and improving, for weeks yet, and the tension is bad for her."

"We Thistles have all been kept in a state of tension on her account," whispered Fanny. "Such a fidget! Once she tore up a page and the breeze blew the fragments down into the garden. Kate's imagination, of course, beheld Julia & Co. hard at work piecing these precious scraps together; so off we went to pick them up. We found nearly all, and Verena climbed up and brought down some that were sticking in the grape vine; but Kate vowed there must be more, and kept going about like a Parisian *chiffonier*, pouncing with a crooked hairpin upon every stray bit of written paper within walking distance. Of course, she has had twenty narrow escapes from the Nettles, and Elisabeth met her haunting your domicile and began scolding her for idleness. Poor Kate!—I often wonder how she will develop, and

whether she will go to college simply to escape from what Cornie calls Professor Armstrong's terribly scientific home."

"If the truth were known," said Grace, "I believe it would be found that half of the girls who go to college do so in order to avoid something unpleasant at home, or to enlarge their circle of acquaintances, or from some other motive than a love for study. But I hardly think a college life would suit Kate. She is too dreamy. She reminds me of Hans Andersen's 'Little Mermaid,' with her sadness and her longings for the unknown world above the waves. And, when I said so to Agnes, Bess broke in, dry and disagreeable, declaring that the Mermaid must have been 'very discontented' to have had any such longings. She hasn't enough imagination herself to understand it, so, of course, she stamps on it, to display her own superiority. It is cruel that Kate must have such an uncongenial sister! Perhaps it may drive her to a college—but I can't think of her as in her element at any. She would probably count for far less there than here, and would feel shy, and solitary, and fail to show herself to advantage, and would only retire into her shell amid the crowd."

"There, I've given it to Frau Schulze at last!" cried Kate, rushing into the gymnasium,

where Verena awaited her, the next afternoon. "She is to stay and pass judgment upon it—and I'm quaking, for it's not the mere love of acting—I should feel so ashamed to have my play condemned after so much fuss, and Fanny and some others would tease me forever."

"Of course! Come into the garden and watch the storm rising."

Hand in hand they raced out of doors, escaping with difficulty from some Thistles who tried to capture them for a game of Twenty Questions, and breathing only when they gained their shelter among the bushes.

"What a relief to be here alone!" sighed Kate, glancing at the low, leaden clouds on the horizon. "Hark, the wind is rising, and whirling the dust, and flapping the vine leaves! Oh, how wild and delicious this is!"

"Let us climb into that quince tree and rock," said Verena. "I wish there were more noise and we might sing without being overheard."

"I wish we were higher," said Kate, as they mounted among the low, gnarled boughs. "Wasn't it Michael Angelo who, when he was a boy, went up into a tree to watch a storm? Oh, I know how he must have exulted in it!"

"I should like to go up into that tall cherry tree yonder," cried Verena, whom her friend was viewing with intense admiration and secret sighs of longing to possess such beauty, as,

standing erect, and clinging to the branches, she upturned her fine profile and streaming hair against the dark, scudding storm clouds.

“No—it’s beyond bounds, and we mustn’t spoil our prospects. Oh—Verena, you can understand how all this grand commotion of the storm, and the thunder, and the wild wind, and the flapping leaves, and the lowering sky, seems to mingle with my own inward excitement and suspense, until I feel ready to sing, or scream, because it sets me frantic with delight.”

“Of course I understand; didn’t Foxey tell me how Julia had named me ‘Elsie Venner,’ because I am unlike herself, and enjoy all kinds of things undreamed of in her philosophy. I suppose half the girls would call us cranks for being here, delighting in the uproar, instead of cowering indoors and squealing. Hark!—the thunder! It makes me think of that chorus in the ‘Bride of Messina,’ about”——

“Stop!” interrupted Kate. “It’s too appropriate for me just now, for I feel ‘in the power of dreadful Destiny’ when I think of Frau Schulze, and being summoned for sentence, and—hark, some one is calling us!”

Grace Howard came running, breathless.

“Come back at once. We are all ordered to go in.”

A few large drops pattered on the branches as she spoke, and by the time they reached the

house the heavy shower poured down in all its fury. Kate, nervously awaiting her summons, started violently whenever anyone opened the door of the school-room, whither she and Verena had fled for refuge from the incessant chatter of the parlor, and grew yet more anxious at finding that she did not encounter Frau Schulze at supper, that meal being served her in Mrs. Hill's study, where Kate's imagination pictured her as condemning both the drama and its author. Her studies for the morrow were finished, but she sought escape from a noisy game at Proverbs by again going to her desk, where she had not sat long before Cornie came in search of her, accompanied by several other able-bodied Thistles, who playfully threatened to carry off herself and Verena by force.

"Let me go, Cornie!" cried Kate, struggling out of her tall friend's grasp. "It's all very fine to pretend that this invasion is caused by a wish to see more of me—but you know very well that you want me, or Verena, to sit by you, and prompt you finely through the game, in French, because you can't possibly get along by yourself—so don't try to catch me by talking moonshine of any sort!"

"Kate is cutting her wisdom teeth at last!" muttered one of the girls, to the secret satisfaction of the person referred to. Verena, meanwhile, had mounted on top of her desk,

playfully fighting off their outstretched hands, and declaring she would only yield to superior strength; and there is no telling how the scene would have ended if Miss Almira, entering to preserve discipline, had not sent the aggressive crew, as they did not pretend to have come there to study, back into the parlor at once.

Kate and Verena put up their desk-lids and exchanged low whispers, while their friends, the actresses-expectant of the German troupe, came dropping in, one by one, pretending to be absorbed in work, but in reality awaiting further developments. A dozen pairs of eager eyes gazed with sympathy after Kate's shrinking form when, a little while after, she received a summons from Miss Dorinda, and, taking her arm to steady her own uncertain footsteps, left the room.

"Worse than the dentist's!" murmured Fanny to Verena, who nodded.

Mild, simple-hearted Dorinda hardly knew what made the child so nervous, but her innocent, wondering sympathy helped to soothe her. She put her arm round Kate and almost carried her across the dreaded threshold. Minos and Rhadamanthus awaited her in the persons of Miss Hill, Miss Clive and Frau Schulze, seated round the upper end of the table, at the foot of which Kate sank into a chair, her heart beating so fast that it nearly suffocated her. Kate had

never fainted in her life, and, like many girls of her age, fancied that it must be very fine and romantic; she thought now that it would be so delightful to fall down in the midst of her critics and frighten them all by lying on the floor for a long time before she could be made to "come to," and absorb them so completely with fears for her body that they should be unable to exercise harshness on the subject of her mind. Alas! she remained provokingly conscious, and suffering in proportion.

Miss Clive, as usual, did not wait to let anyone else have the first word.

"Katharine Armstrong!" she began abruptly, her piercing eyes devouring poor Kate and the surprised Dorinda at her side. "Your production has been read aloud by Frau Schulze, who has also made the requisite corrections of its occasional faults in German grammar and construction. A certain amount of juvenile redundancy may, at your age, be excused."

Kate's head, not very far above the top of the table as she sat drooping, now sank almost out of sight.

"We think, however," Miss Clive went on, with a torturing solemnity and slowness, "that—although there is, naturally, a great deal that is open to harsh criticism from a literary point of view—that, in spite of certain dramatic

shortcomings, and of high-flown expressions, to say nothing of certain improbabilities and an utter lack of humor, which is an unpardonable defect in a production of this nature, intended for a school—in spite, also, of the somewhat hackneyed nature of the chief incidents—great originality in such matters being scarcely to be expected from one so young as yourself—that, all things considered, especially the time and pains you have bestowed upon this play—it is possible that something may be made of it (Kate felt so weak with the reaction from her terror that she fairly gasped). I will not now enter into a discussion upon particulars. Mrs. Hill has consented to its performance”——

Kate's increasing agitation brought Miss Clive's oration to an untimely end, for she burst into a fit of hysterical sobbing. Miss Clive, half-angry and half-alarmed, sprang to her side, and, scolding at Dorinda to vent her own irritation, stood over Kate, vainly endeavoring to talk her out of her passion of tears; while Mrs. Hill, much distressed, and Frau Schulze, overflowing with voluble sympathy in her native tongue, plied her with scent bottles, ice water and reassuring words.

“Adelaide, you must not scold her now,” interrupted Mrs. Hill in a low voice. “You had better go and tell the others.”

Miss Clive, who always treated her nominal

head with great deference, departed, to the relief of Kate, who quickly regained her composure, much assisted by the praises which the excited Frau bestowed upon her play, with a few mild attempts at criticism, to satisfy her own conscience.

The game of Proverbs was just breaking up when Miss Clive (followed by the expectant troupe, who quietly slipped out of the school-room as soon as they heard her crossing the hall) appeared in all her stateliness in the parlor and, commanding silence, announced the unexpected news of the German performance, to the infinite surprise of nearly all present, and the huge relief of certain guilty consciences among several young madcaps, who, of course, fancied she had come to publish sundry misdemeanors of their own, and bring them to justice.

“Well, I declare!” exclaimed Cornie. “So this is the meaning of all Kate’s hiding away and queer conduct! Girls, won’t she enjoy it? She’ll outshine Bess some day, after all. Her majesty will be jealous.”

“Bess writes and acts poorly herself; so, of course, it will be her object to decry Kate and spoil her pleasure, in her amiable sisterly fashion,” said Fanny, “but she’ll take out her grumble and subside into high and mighty indifference. Julia’s the one who will try to

worry us—look at her, with her malicious, sarcastic, supercilious face!”

For once Fanny had reason to rejoice that her teacher's quick ears had overheard what she had said.

“Julia Maxwell!” suddenly exclaimed Miss Clive, turning round and confronting that young lady and her especial friends, whom she proceeded to summon by name and made appear in a row before her. “You have all heard what I gave out just now. You are all to appear in a play where the characters will be sustained by yourselves, and those whom you have chosen. You have no reason to complain of not being considered in this matter. I now request of you (Miss Clive grew so solemn that Fanny, as she said afterwards, could only compare her to a clergyman reading the Marriage Service at ‘I require and charge of you both’)—I now request of you, as gentlewomen, that you will, each and all, give me your solemn word of honor here, in the presence of the school, that you will not by deed or word, much less by any miserable tricks, utterly beneath the dignity of ladies, endeavor to annoy or in any way molest Katharine Armstrong, or any of those who shall be united with her for this amusement now in prospect.”

Julia's arched, handsome dark eyebrows had been gradually drawn together into as near a

scowl as she dared assume in the presence of her resolute young commander, who stood with her head thrown back, her black braided hair shining in the lamplight, arms folded and a lion-like expression on her face.

"You have heard me?" Miss Clive went on quietly. "I await your answer."

"Don't be foolish, but promise. Why should we all get into trouble?" whispered Cecilia Morgan to her hesitating and unwilling companion, who yet remained silent, while the whole array of girls looked on, expectant.

Julia muttered some sulky reply to Cecilia, but her effrontery gradually gave way under the eyes of Miss Clive, Madame Verrier, two other teachers and nearly eighty scholars, and, after a momentary silence, she grumbled the required promise.

"Give me your hand and speak out bravely, as a gentlewoman should," began Miss Clive, extending her own strong right hand towards Julia's thin, cold fingers, which met hers with a slight, unwilling grasp.

"I promise!" repeated Julia, in an audible voice, glad to relinquish her hold and withdraw behind Cecilia and the others, who reluctantly, as though branded as professional teasers, but without hesitation, came forward in turn to give their word.

"I'm thankful for this," whispered Grace to

Fanny and Verena, who seemed scarcely able to contain their joy at seeing their chronic enemies bound over to preserve the peace henceforth. "Julia is mischievous and malicious; but she is not likely to break a public pledge for the sake of any tricks, and the others will follow her example."

"Hm!" said Fanny. "I'll give her the benefit of the doubt and keep my eye on her all the same. Well, poor Kate is out of torment, anyhow, so let us go to congratulate her and hear about our rôles at last."

CHAPTER XI.

EXPECTATION.

“**V**ERENA, take your Hungarian dress and those furred boots. Grace, do not let your set of costumes be mixed with Julia’s. Frances, stop your incessant chatter! And Katharine, I request again that you will endeavor to restrain your unfortunate excitability, which may readily cause you to break down and ruin the whole.”

Thus Miss Clive bestowed her parting counsels ere leaving her pupils to rehearse under Frau Schulze’s auspices, luckily without seeing the smiles which her own excited reference to Kate’s excitability had provoked. Regarding the exalted spirits that she strove to repress, the General might have found a sufficient cause thereof in a certain thin pamphlet-like book in Kate’s hand, which was nothing else than her play, corrected and improved by Frau Schulze, and arrayed in the dignity of type. Miss Clive’s edict that Kate must not be annoyed by suggestions from her troupe was, as might have been expected, much more “honored in the breach than in the observance;”

since every girl, of course, had some notion concerning her own part which she tried to carry out.

Boldly repeating Miss Clive's assertion that the piece lacked humor, Fanny Fox and Verena combined to introduce lively interludes into the dialogue, as they said, for their Anglo-Saxon audience, who, if able to follow the German text at all, would certainly require something more than the pathetic, the romantic, or even the melodramatic to sustain them under the four acts into which it must unavoidably be divided. Grace and Agnes conspired with another prominent actress to improve their speeches, gladly assisted by Frau Schulze, their example soon followed by others, until the play, as amended, contrasted strangely enough with what its young authoress had first written. Mrs. Hill, finding that learning from the manuscript involved too much time and trouble, had had a number of copies printed for the use of the girls, to the unspeakable delight of Kate, who, as "Foxey" had foretold, was being treated by "Queen Bess" to a series of snubs and rough remarks intended to twit her, and give vent to a lurking jealousy, and dislike at seeing her becoming important. This, however, did not seriously affect her happiness; since her sister's conduct, ostensibly based upon regret that Kate should waste her time in scribbling silly stuff when she ought to be

only thinking of study, was clearly seen through by all, affording general amusement, and rendering Kate still more of a heroine by contrast.

What between her own romantic tastes and the dread of making her play intolerably heavy to a more or less uncomprehending audience, she had resolved to spare no pains to render it as effective and spectacular as possible. It was well that she found such an ally as Frau Schulze and the energetic Herr Professor, who, always partial to his "*Pathenkind*," as he called his godchild, soon caught the prevailing dramatic fever, spending most of his spare time at Mount Cedar, working as stage carpenter, scene painter and leader of the orchestra, insisting that, in Verena's honor, the overture should begin with the national Hungarian air "*Rakotsky's March*," followed by the "*Wacht am Rhein*," in compliment to Kate.

But—roses, as we are always being told, are never without thorns, and Kate Armstrong's little bouquet of dramatic enjoyment had its full share thereof. Her play began with a dialogue between two peasant boys, which both Miss Clive and the Frau declared must be left out, for fear of unduly prolonging the German piece, following, as it must, on the heels of the French one. Another of the "*Gravamena*,"* as

* Grievances stated by the Hungarian Diet to the King.

Verena playfully chose to call them, was that the Will-o'-the-Wisps were not allowed to dance with lighted torches, Mrs. Hill deciding that this was entirely too dangerous; while yet another arose from the ruthless suppression of a scene between two charming Kobolds, which, though praised by Frau Schulze as highly appropriate in itself, must yield to the awful necessity of not keeping the audience too long.

The rehearsal went forward, with some mistakes, but much enjoyment.

"Where is the jewel for the Hungarian lady?" asked the tall brunette who had been "cast" for that part.

"I forgot! I'll run and fetch my locket," cried Kate, so excited that her cherished keepsake no longer reminded her of mournful things.

"No," Verena broke in; "I have something which will do even better."

The girls crowded round her, uttering exclamations of delight, as, opening a carved jewel case of dark, scented wood, she displayed a large, richly wrought locket of massive gold.

"How beautiful!" cried Grace. "Is that a ruby in the center?"

"No, a carbuncle; and the initials in tiny pearls are those of my grandparents. My grandfather was a full Magyar, but my grandmother was half a German. This was his gift to her more than fifty years ago."

Verena seemed the embodiment of keen, girlish enjoyment as she showed her foreign-looking treasure, exulting in the prominent part assigned to her, forgetting her past melancholy and laughingly receiving Kate's assertion that it was delightful to find she was partly German, because Kate herself had a far-off streak of German blood. "And I love carbuncles—there is something romantic about them. Don't you remember how Margaret Fuller called them her own especial gems?—and she is one of my greatest 'objects of interest,' like Mrs. Browning and Emily Brontë, and—don't laugh so, Fanny; you know you must respect such women, even though you mayn't respect me."

"Actresses!" began Grace, "if you dawdle over that locket any more we shall never get past the first act to-day."

"There's no time to waste, for our characters are all staked on the success of this brilliant novelty," said Cornie. "We are all blessing Kate for contriving so many 'supers,' large and small, that not only every Thistle of Mount Cedar, but everybody, except those Nettles and Queen Bess, is to appear. I'm to be gorgeously attired as a gypsy girl in the first part, and all in black, as a nun, in the second; and I mean to do my 'walking rôles' so beautifully that no one will think it is the same person."

“It is the most exciting piece we have had since that one Madame likes, about the Huguenots,” said Sophie Howard. “Don’t you remember how we enjoyed that scene where we poor persecuted fugitives were hiding in such a delightful cave, made up of chairs piled anyhow, with draperies flung over them—and Jake rattled a sheet of tin behind the scenes for thunder, and the Dragon flashed the gas up and down for lightning, only Jake was always in a hurry to thunder too soon, so our storm wasn’t conducted on strictly scientific principles. That was”——

“Charming, but not equal to this, though it isn’t a tragedy,” broke in “Foxey,” perching herself on top of a table beside Kate and twining an arm round her. “Thistles, don’t exult too soon! My memory reminds me how, in stories, something almost always happens to spoil a frolic. If it is a play, somebody falls ill, or bad news arrives, or one of the heroines has a sprained ankle, or some horrible *contretemps* is made to take place, so as to prevent the *finale* and point a moral. We don’t want to serve as an example. Let us rehearse and enjoy ourselves while we may.”

The dreaded ordeal of the examination went off with success. Brownie, to her surprise, gained the medal for general good conduct,

which she feared to miss because of the affair at Martin's Hill, while Kate, in what Fanny called her condition of rapt ecstasy, and so thrilled by excitement that she outshone many prettier girls who did not rise to the level of the occasion, was called up to receive the prizes for languages and composition on which she had set her heart. Fanny, as usual, came off with distinction; Verena had honorable mention; while Cornie, though never a fine scholar, won praises for her music.

Miss Clive was in her glory. She swept about in her long, pale silk, looking, the girls said, like Tennyson's *Princess*, enjoying the stir and excitement; while poor Miss Almira, fretted and overworked, took the lion's share in all domestic arrangements, and seldom appeared among the pupils. The most spacious hall in the large building was prepared for the theatricals, which began early in the afternoon of the day after the examination closed. Jake and Sandy, the former grinning with innocent delight, the latter more than usually grim and looking with the eyes of a rigid Cameronian upon all such vanities, were busily executing the final orders regarding the stage, a large wooden platform, easily erected and taken down, that was kept from year to year, and crowding as many seats as possible into the space reserved for the audience, always num-

bering many friends and relatives of the girls, besides guests from the neighborhood.

The worst of the "Gravamena" upon this otherwise happy day was that Frau Schulze, having privately captured Kate and Verena, eloquently besought them to allow her to shorten their hair, which flowed down in a style decidedly too feminine even for young gentlemen of the seventeenth century. The fear of spoiling the effect of their important rôles overcame every other consideration, and the two heroes of the drama consented to part with half of their redundant locks, astonishing the Thistles by reappearing with hair only reaching to their shoulders, and having to endure sundry jests referring to their recent vainglorious boast that not even the dramatic necessity so dear to their hearts should induce them to part with more than an inch or two, to satisfy Frau Schulze's mind.

The French play went off with *éclat*. Julia Maxwell really acted with great spirit, while Cecilia sustained her rather languid part with much grace. Ranged on long benches in front of the audience, the German troupe, in white, and proudly displaying whatever medals they had won, surveyed the clever performance of the "Nettles" with critical eyes, though, for the sake of appearance, often joining in the applause.

Kate, in the seventh heaven of anticipation, kept overwhelming her next neighbor with whispered directions regarding her grand *entrée* as Marsh-King and leader of the Will-o'-the-Wisps; while Fanny and Verena exchanged low comments under cover of the music ere the curtain rose.

“That sweet-faced lady over yonder, in gray, with a boy, is Mrs. Leslie, from Quebec, Kate’s godmother. None of the Armstrongs are here. They are a remarkable family all through. The Professor is a man of whom even I stand in awe, dreadfully dry and severe, and despising art and poetry. His son, about seventeen, is said to be a younger edition of his papa, and the pretty daughter, of Kate’s age, takes after her worldly mamma, and looks down upon her shy, bookish little cousin. Kate’s uncle won’t allow her to make visits in the holidays, because he doesn’t want to ask anyone in return, though the Leslies, in Virginia’s time, used to swoop her off with a bold, military stroke (the Colonel is in the British army, you know), and I shouldn’t wonder if her godmother were contriving how to spirit her away from this hot-bed of dramatic temptation with a *coup de main* now.”

Verena gasped at the idea of losing Kate; but now the curtain rose upon the French play, dull and heavy according to the standard of the

German troupe and of the fanciful Hungarian, who thought their own exclusion from it a piece of good fortune, and felt impatient at having to sit through it. The Thistles, joyfully obeying the summons to go and dress, overheard Julia, entering to seat herself among the audience, remark that "Elsie Venner was worth looking at just now, for the lights, and the fuss, and the costumes had sent her off into a more crazy fit than usual." Left-handed compliments like this, however (since all knew that Verena was looking her very best), had grown too common from Julia's lips for anyone to take them very seriously, and only lent them a keener relish for the amusement about to begin.

* * * * *

Herr Professor Friedrich Wilhelm Schulze's short, square form, and broad, kindly face now appeared, just below the stage, followed by several hired musicians with wind instruments, the first sounds from which caused the spectators (who had availed themselves of the interval between the two dramas to scatter in the garden) to rally without delay until the large hall and a smaller room opening into it by folding doors were again filled to overflowing. The thrilling national airs soon passed into a joyous, simple melody as the curtain rose upon a woodland scene which it had tasked the united

energies of the Schulzes and the dramatic corps to prepare according to Kate's directions.

The school theatre possessed a set of canvas trees, but they were almost hidden by young firs cut from the banks bordering the high road, grassy sods, pine cones and soft clumps of moss being heaped around them. In the background, where a painted scene with a late-afternoon sky gave a glimpse into the distance, tufts of reeds, rushes and other aquatic plants were placed upright, to indicate a marsh supposed to be stretching across a wide opening in the German forest.

In order to understand the drama, it may be well to give the play-bill, of which copies had been printed and distributed among the audience. Kate, of course, would have liked to have them in German, but found even the Schulzes arrayed against her; while Mrs. Hill made a sort of compromise by settling that the names of the actresses should be prefixed by "Fräulein" instead of "Miss," as follows:

THE CLOISTER IN THE FOREST.

(Das Kloster im Walde.)

Romantic Drama in Four Acts.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

HELENA, Countess Zrinyi, a Hungarian,

Fräulein Lindsay

LADISLAUS, her son, ten years old,

Fräulein Forster

BERTHA, Countess von Altheim, a German,

Fräulein Leslie

CHRISTINE, her confidential servant,

Fräulein Preston

HILDEGARDE, a young Abbess..Fräulein Howard

AGATHA, an elderly nun.....Fräulein Wilson

KATHARINA, a young nun. . . . Fräulein Somers

ZARA, an elderly gypsy.....Fräulein Palmer

FRIEDRICH, her supposed grandson,

Fräulein Armstrong

ILLOUSCHKA, a Hungarian gypsy girl,

Fräulein Fox

TARSCHA, Queen of a gypsy tribe,

Fräulein Russell

LOKI, an Evil Spirit, King of the Marsh,

Fräulein Wagner

CHORUS.

WILL-O'-THE-WISPS.

GYPSY GIRLS AND WOMEN.

NUNS.

The Scene is somewhere on the Borders of Germany, towards the close of the Thirty Years' War.

Composed by Fräulein Armstrong,
Assisted by others, and acted by the Pupils of
Mount Cedar Seminary, June —, 18—.

CHAPTER XII.

FULFILLMENT.

FRAU SCHULZE has so repeatedly harangued her troupe regarding the duty of not wearying the audience by any of those "waits" too apt to occur in amateur performances that the last notes of the overture have hardly died away before the figures of Ladislaus and the Countess Zrinyi, in their rich Hungarian dresses, are seen advancing from behind the trees. Led by her son, the exhausted lady reaches the center of the stage and seats herself upon the needles of the pines, her graceful boy bending over her, in his scarlet tunic braided with gold, short cloak cast over one shoulder, full, sombre-hued trousers over long red stockings, and boots edged with fur, while the bright plumes and jeweled aigrette of the cap he holds shine out against the dusky evergreens.

The dialogue, mournful on the part of Helena and spirited on that of Ladislaus, tells us how they have left their castle in Hungary to be near Count Zrinyi, who serves in the Imperialist army, and has recently been wounded. Recov-

ering in a town taken from the enemy, and again surprised, he has rushed into battle, at the head of his men, and fallen. Accompanied only by her little son (for the two faithful followers who had started with them have been slain by chance shots on the way), the Countess now is seeking to gain the headquarters of her brother, beyond the gloomy forest, and, worn out by grief and wandering, believes herself about to die.

Ladislaus tried to cheer her, but in vain. Her words of parting counsel (ruthlessly abridged by Frau Schulze) are accompanied by a few low bars of music, as she takes from her bosom a certain keepsake, a jewel given her by the Count in happier days, and places it round the neck of her boy with a solemnity causing the bevy of actresses waiting behind the scenes to banter Kate unmercifully about the manner in which Mrs. Hill had restored to her the lost locket a few weeks ago.

The Countess, rising as she unclasps the jewel, remains standing with uplifted hand, her son kneeling upon one knee before her, his face towards the left of the stage, from which the fair-haired peasant child Friedrich now enters, a long staff in his hand, at first reluctant to intrude upon what seems to him more like some scene between fairy creatures, such as haunt this forest, than the farewell of a mother and her son.

The fir trees rustle as he steps forward, causing Helena to start and Ladislaus to spring to his feet, bidding the humble stranger to remain and asking his name. Friedrich, leaning on his staff, while Ladislaus, sheathing the jeweled dagger he has brandished, seats himself beside his mother, tells them his simple history. He is the orphaned grandchild of Zara, a Hungarian gypsy, who, having left her tribe and married a German peasant, now dwells, poor, widowed, and, but for himself, alone, in a hut deep in the heart of the forest. She is a skilful leech, knowing the virtues of all herbs, and earning her scanty living by the sale of these; but the peasantry, whom she avoids, deem her a sorceress, and shun her. Friedrich, too, has been often roughly handled by the village lads, who say he has been bewitched by Zara's arts. He has haunting dreams of a fair, bright-haired lady, in a castle, who caressed him, and of a noble gentleman, and of how he sailed with them, at sunset, down a gleaming river in a tiny boat. He saw the sky grow dark—and then the boat went under in a sudden storm, and he knew nothing more until he woke in the deep solemn wood, where the moonlight shone coldly through the fir tops upon the dusky face of his grandmother as she rocked him in her arms; while from beyond the pines, rustling softly in the night wind, resounded the gysies' wild, barbaric song.

The Countess interrupts him to ask whether there are gypsies in the forest, beseeching him to tell her of some place of shelter. He says that his grandmother's cottage is but that of a gypsy, of one so wild and strange that he has never been able to return her love, for her sad dark eyes inspire him with terror. The village, too, lies far away, and farther yet the home of his friend, the good pastor, who had taught him to read and write. (Sundry Thistles are whispering that no Armstrong could possibly have stooped to depict even a peasant boy ignorant of "The Three R's"). One safe and holy refuge he can tell of. It is an ancient cloister, deeply hidden among the clustering pines.

Ladislaus entreats him to guide them thither; but Friedrich says that he does not even know the way. Long ago his grandmother had led him past its old gray walls at evening. He saw the sunset gilding the cross upon the chapel, and heard the nuns' sweet voices in their vesper hymn. Gladly would he have lingered, but Zara drew him onward, her dark brows knit together as if in pain. He never found that quiet sanctuary again. But he knows that Oscar, a shepherd boy now with his flock upon a meadow near the wood, may be able to tell him the way. He will seek him and return. Helena thanks him in delight, and her son promises

Friedrich that, if he finds them the wished-for shelter, he shall be taken, as his own page, to their Hungarian home. But the German boy is already out of sight behind the firs, singing snatches of song about his passionate love for the beautiful forest.

Helena thinks anxiously about the gypsies, regarding whom Friedrich has given them some useful hints in case of an encounter, and Ladislaus, eager to sustain her courage, sings her a wild, stirring battle-song (it was one of Petöfi's, which Verena sang in the original Magyar, to an admiring but uncomprehending audience, who fully believed it to be German, and a genuine part of the play, until enlightened by some of the troupe, who had slipped in for a glimpse of the stage before it should be their own turn to appear thereon). Just as the rich notes of the young Count's voice die away, a wild, sad, confused murmur, as though from angry elfin creatures, is heard from the depths of the wood. Helena starts up in terror, which her son vainly tries to soothe. She will not await Friedrich's coming, for again, still louder, the unearthly sounds arise from beyond the trees on either side. Seizing her boy's hand, she hurries him away despite his protests, while the jewel she has hung round his neck falls off, unseen by both, and lies at the edge of the morass, the bright gems on

Verena's Hungarian locket sparkling in the light. (It was here that Kate had originally introduced the kobolds, who were to hint at marvelous things connected with the lost treasure, to sing and dance.) A sad, wild, confused melody fills up the brief but necessary pause, and the stage is darkened to denote the approach of evening.

Friedrich returns, breathless and smiling, but stops short at finding his new friends already vanished. Was it, then, all a dream, he asks himself, like those visions of the lovely lady and the boat? No—yonder, near the marsh, he tracks their footsteps, and, lo! the jewel he has seen shining upon the young Hungarian's breast is lying on the earth. Friedrich takes it up and vows that, come what may, he will find him and restore this precious keepsake. (Innumerable witticisms, meanwhile, are exchanged behind the scenes about Kate's locket and old Jake.) But night is coming, and a distant evening bell rings, deep and full-toned, through the forest. Its echoes die away into the twilight air, and a low, sad music sounds.

Suddenly a faint twinkling light is seen behind the foliage on the edge of the morass, and the music, never wholly silent throughout this scene, grows louder, quicker; then leaps up, harsh and wild.

Friedrich, clasping the young Magyar's jewel

to his breast, stands in the center of the darkened stage as a goblin troop of the Will-o'-the-Wisps slowly and silently enter out of the marsh, their home.

All the youngest girls are dressed alike, in dark-brown tunics, hardly reaching to the knee, their long red stockings worn outside of the felt shoes, which render their footfalls noiseless. A brown mantle hangs down behind, its upper part drawn over the head like a cowl or the quaint caps worn by kobolds, save that its peaked end is stiffly lined and stands upright, adorned by a large tinsel star that glitters as its wearer moves.

The "Irrlichter," as Frau Schulze calls them, carry wands decked with bright marsh plants, a long, brown, velvety "cat-tail," from a bunch which Kate had kept since the preceding autumn, forming the top thereof.

Softly stealing from behind the trees, these dusky forms file in and range themselves, their leader (Brownie, in high glee) waving his wand towards the marsh, and crying, in chorus with the rest, "The King!"

The music, which had again grown low and plaintive, resumes its wild gayety as a small, fairylike figure emerges from the background, and, swiftly marching through the goblin ranks, pauses at Friedrich's side.

It is Loki, the Marsh King, in a short tunic

bordered with gay leaves and water lilies, with a merry countenance, and wildly streaming auburn locks crowned with bright purple flags and other marsh flowers. He bears a scepter adorned with the same, surmounted by great scarlet blossoms, slowly raising it towards the wondering mortal child as he demands what he is doing in these haunts of the Marsh Spirits after the tolling of the evening bell, which is their welcome signal for quitting the morass wherein they are fast bound through the daylight hours, and joining the merry gnomes, and elves, and kobolds in their dances in the forest.

Friedrich, uplifting the young Magyar's jewel, declares that he must hasten in search of the fugitives; while the Marsh King, echoed by his troop of Will-o'-the-Wisps, mocks at his errand, and threatens him with being forced to remain and partake of their revels. The "Irrlichter" form into a circle, capering round them in a lively dance greatly enjoyed by the performers, and presently joined in by the King, with Friedrich, his unwilling guest, who, however, makes the best of it by footing it away as blithely as the rest. The dance is followed by much marching and countermarching, which, greatly applauded, only ends when Friedrich tries to depart, when the whole crew encircle him, and he stands a prisoner, but resolute, in the center of the mocking "Irrlichter," while

Loki, in his longest speech, is so near to forgetting an important line, and causing what in theatrical circles is called a "gag" by his hesitation, that Friedrich, calmly awaiting his destiny, feels inclined to quake in earnest.

The background has grown dark; the foot-lights burn feebly, and a faint light falls obliquely upon the dim forms as they flit to and fro. The Will-o'-the-Wisps, as Loki waves his scepter, withdraw to either side, those nearest to the audience sinking upon one knee, wildly gesticulating, all pointing with their wands into the dark distance, and uniting in a loud, derisive chorus. Again Loki waves his scepter, bidding Friedrich look upon a vision blazing into light beyond the dark background.

Far away, above the low tops of the young firs, behind a transparency, appear the forms of Ladislaus and his mother, alone on a desolate waste, gazing out into the night. Friedrich's loud cry is heard above the wild chorus of the spirits as he vainly tries to spring forward, encircled by the goblins, whose wands impede his progress; while, at another signal from Loki, the vision changes, and the half-fainting Helena and her still undaunted son are surrounded by a throng of gypsy women, in strange attire, lit up by a crimson glow.

Kate, at this juncture, would have liked to introduce a whole troop of woodland elves,

fairies and good-natured kobolds, who, after parleying with the "Irrlichter," and joining in the ballet, should finally rescue Friedrich from their hands by force, or, at least, allow the curtain to fall upon a stage crammed full of her uncanny friends, whirling and leaping hither and thither, singing, shouting and leaving the spectators in a thrilling confusion as to the result. This being clearly beyond the possibilities of her troupe, she was forced to content herself with allowing the visions to vanish in the darkness, while the "Irrlichter" and their monarch again encircle the boy, mocking and tormenting him in a style exceedingly congenial to these young performers, who do not fail to carry out her directions to make matters lively by hazing Friedrich as much as possible. The Marsh King seizes him, dragging him towards the morass, and wildly singing, as, amid a strain of martial music, the curtain falls upon the first act of Kate's fantasia; while the audience, who, fortunately, do not as yet appear at all bored, and are certainly aware that they must resign themselves to seeing a good deal of nonsense, are sufficiently mindful of the pains taken by the Thistles and their friends to refresh the anxious spirits of the actresses by most kindly and welcome applause.

ACT SECOND.

Brilliantly lighted, and with several torches carefully placed among the dark branches of the firs, the stage now displays the gypsy encampment, whither, as indicated by the vision, the unfortunate Hungarians have wandered. The choice novelty of the scene consists in a bright crescent moon shining up above the tree-tops in the background, over the group of elderly gypsy women gathered round the traditional kettle hanging from three sticks. To the right sits old Tarscha, the queen, arrayed in brilliant colors, a scarlet kerchief tied over her gray locks, as, with a long hazel wand like a divining rod in her hand, she keeps a sly watch over the despondent Helena, sitting opposite, Ladislaus, fresh and undaunted, at her side.

The foreground, as the curtain rises to merry music, is filled by a crowd of maidens in gay attire, foremost of whom is Ilouschka (Fanny), now keeping her birthday festival, with rows of gold sequins glittering in her soft, dark hair, scarlet beads twined round her throat, chains and bracelets shining in the footlights, a tambourine uplifted in her hand.

Singing a brief, gay chorus, she leads the others in a dance. The spectators, who find this dancing more to their taste than Kate's



The Hungarian Dance.

cherished Will-o'-the-Wisps, or the affairs of the unfortunate Magyars, loudly applaud, demanding a repetition, which the maidens gladly give, but soon withdraw to either side. Behind the girlish forms we see the sinister-looking older women, coming and going at old Tarscha's bidding, clustering and whispering together. The red light from beneath the cauldron shines on Helena's pale face and the young Count's graceful figure as he bends over her.

Ilouschka, small, slight and brilliant with girlish beauty, remains alone in the foreground. Gay though she seems, she is weary of her rude, evil companions, longing to escape from them and to aid the Hungarians, helpless in their midst. But her birthday must not end so soon. Striking her tambourine, she breaks off her soliloquy and dances alone, soon interrupted by a loud, glad cry of "*Eljen, Ilouschka, Eljen!*" from the background.

Glancing round, she asks coquettishly who has uttered the Hungarian shout of applause. The little Count springs forward, answering that it is he, the young guest from the Magyar land. Affecting a gay demeanor, she jests with the boy about Hungary, her birthplace, and that of her betrothed, an Austrian soldier, concerning whom she has invented much innocent banter which would never have entered the head of Kate. Ladislaus is invited by her to dance

the *Csardàs*, but at first refuses, for a heavy grief is weighing on his heart. His mother, recalling Friedrich's warning that, if thrown among the gypsies, Ilouschka is the only one in whom they may trust, gives him a hint to consent. Helena and the women look on with eagerness. The orchestra strikes up the *Csardàs*, accompanied by the cymbals and tambourines of some of the girls seated on either side. Ladislaus throws off his short, furred Hungarian cloak, doffs his small, scarlet-trimmed cap, with its long plume fastened by a gleaming aigrette, and lays them beside the Countess, returning, his bright costume and many ornaments twinkling in the lights, to where Ilouschka, her tambourine put aside, awaits him, a coquettish smile upon her lips.

Verena, whose spirited acting from the moment she had appeared to speak the opening lines had far exceeded even the expectations of her companions, had taught her national dance to Fanny, whose instinctive aptitude for seizing upon its main characteristics quite outshone the utmost she had been able to get out of Kate. This very one-sided dramatist, aware of her own deficiencies, yet much grieved at being forced to yield so many points, found that this scene must be entirely given over to the skilful hands of these two performers, who intersperse their graceful dancing with many

sly strokes of humor, as now one and now another exchanges the rôle of the eager lover for that of the dallying, uncertain swain, delighting in alternate ardor and laughing mockery.

Leaning against the side scenes, her arm round the waist of her friend, the Marsh King, Kate watches the *Csardàs* with a certain irrepressible sadness, arousing the mirth of "Loki" and the "Irrlichter," quite unconscious of the passionate longing she feels to possess a share of Fanny's and Verena's charm and liveliness. How bright and beautiful Verena looks as she begins the dance, her black hair, parted at one side and curling on her forehead, fluttering back from her smiling face, so flushed with excitement that she did not need any rouge, her brilliant dress and sparkling ornaments shimmering among the evergreens, every limb perfect in its lithe, joyous motion, speeding merrily, with beaming eyes and outspread, quivering hands after Fanny, who laughs, shakes her long dark hair till all the golden bangles flash and glitter, folds her arms, roguishly glances backwards and hurries away to the opposite side. Kate feels that she herself, the originator of the whole affair, without whom these clever improvers upon her own ideas would probably never have dreamed of getting up a new play at all, is quite a subordinate personage compared

with these two sparkling beauties, radiant with buoyant mirth and varying expression, at every turn of their untiring performance attracting fresh plaudits from their enthusiastic audience. Friedrich, the peasant boy, has had nothing to complain of; but he is unimportant by the side of Ladislaus and Ilouschka; and Kate feels a momentary sadness, even in the midst of what seems her childish triumph.

The light-footed gypsy girl prolongs the dance, gliding away from the outstretched hands of the little Count, who, on his part, assumes a demeanor of indifference, figuring for a moment with one of the other maidens, and returning to his pursuit only to find himself baffled anew. Ladislaus, redoubling his ardor, seizes one hand of Ilouschka, but finds it snatched away; then, after following her yet once more round the stage, impedes her rapid course by suddenly dropping on one knee in her pathway, his winning smile—Kate marvels that Verena's sad gray eyes can wear that look of brightness—and outspread hands telling his tale, this time with success, for the gypsy, swiftly raising him, whirls round and round in the final figure of the dance; while the maidens, wildly clashing their cymbals and beating their tambourines, swell the rising tumult of applause.

The *Csardàs*, repeated in obedience to the

loud encores, is scarcely ended before Ladislaus, hitherto radiant, stops short, distressed and anxious, his hand swiftly sweeping across his breast, from which he now, for the first time, discovers his jewel to have fallen. In a moment the gay scene is changed to one of hurry and confusion. Instead of the gladness, the

“Nods, and becks, and wreathèd smiles,” which accompanied the dance, a dark sadness steals over his face. His mother and the gypsies crowd round him, vainly seeking on the earth for the missing treasure.

Tarscha, advancing, commands silence, showing him her wand of hazel, saying that it is a divining-rod, and placing it in his hands that he may seek for his lost jewel. Playfully brandishing it, he affects to think it able to detect the spot in human hearts where he may find hidden treasures, inclining it towards Ilouschka, who, afraid of rousing the suspicions of the aged queen by his banter, answers merrily in the same strain. The audience, unable, perhaps, to follow the dialogue very clearly, but charmed with the incessant liveliness and animation of Ladislaus and Ilouschka, are sorry when, at Tarscha's bidding, the gypsies, drawing back from the left side of the stage, disclose a small tent-like shelter among the firs, in which the Countess and her child seek refuge. The women extin-

guish the torches and file out, followed by the girls and Ilouschka, till the darkened stage remains deserted save by two or three crouched as if sleeping round the fire, and by Tarscha, who, in a brief soliloquy, expresses her malignant joy at having these rich strangers fall into her hands, declaring that, as soon as the men of the tribe shall return, she will despatch a messenger to demand a fitting ransom.

The "stage-moon," by means of a simple mechanical contrivance which is the pride of Herr Schulze, now is made to sink slowly behind the dark tree tops. A brief pause is filled by low music from wind instruments, sounding plaintively, as if far away.

Suddenly a voice is heard calling "Friedrich!" thrice repeated, as a tall, stately figure emerges from behind the firs, in sombre garments, a crimson mantle flung over her gray hair, marching past the astonished Tarscha, who starts forward, following her to the footlights, demanding ironically wherefore Zara, who has long since left her tribe and despises them as outcasts, is seen at midnight in their haunts in the forest.

Zara, fiercely turning and again calling "Friedrich," replies that she cares nothing for the gypsies, but wanders seeking for her grandson, who has not returned to her hut that evening; while Tarscha mockingly tells her that she,

called a sorceress, should seek him by means of her own magic arts. Zara, whose dark-eyed, stately beauty lends a touch of tragic pathos to the little play which she well knows how to sustain by her heartfelt, spirited acting, holds a brief dialogue with the gypsy queen, displaying the contrast between her own passionate love for her grandchild and Tarscha's low, mercenary cunning, as, drawing back the tattered curtain from the little tent, she bids Zara look upon these fair guests lately come into her power.

The faint light reveals the Countess Zrinyi asleep in a half-sitting posture, her pale, delicate profile relieved against some crimson drapery, one arm thrown over the shoulders of her child, who lies upon the ground, his head, with its dark, sweeping hair, resting upon her knees. Zara's burst of wrath has given place to sadness, and she uplifts her hands in an agony of useless protest, derided by Tarscha, who, leaving the curtain of the tent drawn back, returns with Zara, whose head is bowed and her arms drooping, to the foreground.

"Thou callest me a robber," says the Queen, with scowling brows. "Art not thou, too, a robber? Do not we all know that the fair-haired Friedrich is not thy grandson, but the heir of a German nobleman, whom thou, these seven years, having saved him from drowning

in the river into which he had fallen from his father's boat, hast kept in the forest for thine own? Art not thou, too, a robber? Speak!"

Zara, overcome by remorse, admits that it is true, but adds that it was no mean thirst of gain, only her own utter desolation, which tempted her to keep the three-years' boy when she found that his parents believed him to have perished. During this dialogue, fiercely malignant on Tarscha's part, tragically earnest and full of a quiet power on Zara's—Ladislaus, in obedience to that convenient dramatic necessity causing actors to awake at the right moment, opens his eyes, sits up, eagerly listening, unseen by the gypsies, and, having learned all, save the name of Friedrich's parents, which is not mentioned, lies down and appears to be asleep.

Zara, wounded by Tarscha's taunts, and still more by the sight of the sleeping fugitives, for whom she intercedes in vain, turns to depart; but the queen, detaining her, waves her hazel wand, bidding her look up.

The dark background opens to solemn music. High up, above the fir trees, appears a vision of Friedrich lying asleep in the peaceful forest. His soft, light curls droop over the right arm, outstretched beneath his head, his left hand clasps the Magyar's jewel to his heart. Round the low grassy bank where he lies stand Loki

and the "Irrlichter," hugely enjoying their final appearance in this easy and romantic picture, which **does not** vanish, but remains unchanging, lit up by a clear, solemn light from the torches formerly serving to illuminate the gypsy camp, and now held by the motionless goblins, their dark attire showing in effective contrast with the gay dress of the Marsh King and the bright costume and blonde coloring of Friedrich, as he lies slumbering, in the highest heaven of dramatic ecstasy, reflecting that even lying dead upon the stage in the last scene of one of Madame's tragedies is less deliciously exciting than this.

The music continues like a dirge, with sudden wails of sound from the wind instruments, causing Kate's heart to beat fast and a few tears to well from beneath her closed eyelids. Ladislaus and his mother lie asleep, sorely regretting that it is not allowable to sit up and look at the vision, as, by the way, they had persisted in doing at rehearsals, to Frau Schulze's wrath. Tarscha remains in the center of the stage, pointing towards Friedrich, at whom Zara gazes in mute anguish, spreading out her arms and slowly sinking on her knees, with drooping head.

The wailing music grows louder and more wildly sad, blending with the strains of an organ and a chorus from behind the scenes, as

though from unseen spirits, thrilling Friedrich's overstrung nerves until he feels hardly able to refrain from sobbing, but happily remains motionless, amid eager clapping from the sympathetic audience, some of whom are almost crying at the effective transition from the preceding scenes of gayety; while poor Miss Almira, who has stolen into a back seat, sits weeping violently, she hardly could tell why, until the curtain falls.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CLOISTER IN THE FOREST.

THE wind instruments in the orchestra are silent, and only organ music from behind the scenes is heard as the curtain rises upon a quiet convent garden. The fir trees are still ranged at the back and sides of the stage and in front of a wall with an antiquated and "practicable" gate facing the audience. To the right is a stone seat; to the left we see a door leading into the chapel, with an image of the Madonna and Child in a niche, near the foreground.

Above the wall shines the invaluable "stage-moon," doing duty for what is supposed to be the evening of the day following the various adventures in the forest, whose pine-tops are visible beyond the enclosure. (Herr Schulze, by the way, has contrived that the said moon shall show a slightly larger crescent than she did for the scene among the gypsies.) The music grows louder as a file of black-robed nuns quit the chapel and pass across the stage, the last one, Katharina, being met by old Agatha, the portress, sharply demanding where the

Abbess Hildegarde lingers, now that the vespers are over.

She answers that Mother Hildegarde still tarries in the chapel with their new guest, the Countess von Altheim, a Protestant lady, hastening to join her wounded husband, and who has sought shelter in the convent for the night, while her men-servants betake themselves to the village, awaiting the armed escort that shall meet her and escort her to the headquarters of the Count. Old Agatha (well-played by a plain, but clever and humorous elder girl) supplies the much-needed comic element to these cloistered scenes, inaccessible to Kate's goblin friends (who, in their stage dresses, are proudly seated on what they call the "actors' bench," in front of the spectators, enjoying the remainder of the play), by displaying much bigoted horror at a heretic having gained a refuge there; while Katharina upholds the action of their young and gentle Abbess, in whose mournful eyes Agatha thinks she reads vain longings for the world she has early been forced to resign. But the chapel door opens, and Agatha, seizing and shaking her long rosary until all its brown beads rattle, angrily exclaims that she will not face that heretic, and, followed by Katharina wistfully glancing backwards, hurries away.

The Abbess Hildegarde (Grace Howard,

whose dark eyes and regular features enable her to look handsome in spite of her plain black robe, black veil and white *guimpe* beneath her chin and round her brows) slowly advances, followed by Bertha von Altheim (Agnes Leslie), pausing in the center of the stage, in most effective contrast. The worldly regrets rebuked by old Agatha form the substance of Hildegarde's speeches, involuntarily comparing her own sad, monotonous destiny with that of the lovely woman at her side. The rôle of the Abbess, in truth, owes its interest and its frequent touches of pathos to the skilful interpolations of Frau Schulze, whose German soul teems with romance, and to the expressive acting of Grace, whose artistic intuition of the capabilities of her part surprises and charms the indulgent audience. The latter, however, are not suffered to grow weary over scenes of sentiment, for the brief dialogue is interrupted by a timid knock at the gate, which, opened by Agatha in answer to the feeble and repeated summons as the sisters flock upon the stage, discloses, against the dim night sky of the background, the forms of Ladislaus and his mother, Ilouschka at their side. She has helped them to escape from the gypsy camp, and, after wandering all day in the forest, has guided them hither to ask for shelter.

The stately Abbess bids them welcome.

Agatha, brandishing the huge key with which she has unlocked and relocked the gate, angrily mutters about the fearful breach of discipline committed by allowing a boy and a wild gypsy maid to enter the sacred precincts, so diverting the spectators by her talk and pantomime that they scarcely heed the exit of the Abbess and her guests, followed by Agatha and the nuns, as they leave to the right, in the direction of the convent, supposed to lie just beyond the garden behind the firs.

A noise of shouts and footsteps breaks in upon the low music. The red light of several torches flashes from behind the wall, a cry is heard, and the form of Friedrich is seen upon the top of the wall, whence he drops into the enclosure. The torchlight wavers among the dark foliage and vanishes; the clamor dies away, and the boy, who has crouched, exhausted, upon the ground, rises and staggers forward.

His face is pale; but the young Magyar's jewel sparkles in those small, trembling hands. A few hurried words of soliloquy explain how he has wearily sought the convent in search of Ladislaus, and, near the gate, was met by the gypsy men, returning to their encampment, who tried to capture him. Faint and bleeding from the stones they have thrown after him, he stands alone in the center of the stage, listening to the deep tones of the organ in the chapel;

then, staggering a few paces forward, sinks in a swoon near the chapel door, half-hidden by the firs.

The sounds of the organ die away; the boy lies motionless, unseen by Ladislaus and Ilouschka, who enter from the right. The gypsy girl comes first, with restless glance and eager tread. Already her wild heart is pining for the freedom of the forest. She abhors the black-veiled nuns, especially old Agatha, who treats her as no better than the thieving vagabonds from whom she has fled. The little Count tries playfully to console her, promising that she shall accompany them to their Hungarian home, and be cared for until she shall marry her soldier lover.

Kate, lying in the long stage swoon she had determined to accomplish, as her friends said, to make up for never having fainted in real life, finds that her two fellow-actresses, as might be expected, are unmercifully regardless of her graceful but rather uncomfortable attitude upon the hard boards, and give themselves abundant time to indulge in banter before finding her out. She is just wondering whether it might not be advisable to "come to" unassisted, and cut their parley short, when Ladislaus, seeing Agatha enter, rushes up to the sour-visaged old nun, flings his audacious arms round her shrinking waist, and merrily invites

her to dance a *Csardàs* with him on the spot. The aged portress utters a shrill squeal of horror, vainly trying to escape from the grasp of the little Count, who drags the poor old nun round and round, in mock heroic imitation of the conclusion of the dance, Ilouschka looking on and laughing, while the audience, heartily amused, laugh in reply.

Agatha, squealing louder, and wringing her hands, is several times whirled round the stage, upbraiding Ladislaus, and whacking her beads in his face, followed by the dancing gypsy maid, who aggravates the situation by all manner of unfeeling fun. The spectators applaud anew, tempting the actresses to prolong Agatha's misery until, shaking herself free at last, she hurries off to lay the case before the Abbess, while the audacious Magyar imprints a kiss on her cheek ere she departs.

Ilouschka and Ladislaus, catching sight of Friedrich, become serious, kneeling by him, seeking to restore him, and beholding with joy and wonder the lost jewel in his hand. Slowly the fainting boy revives as Hildegarde enters with several nuns. It is not childish and unseemly mirth that she now sees, but Friedrich, lying on the earth, supported by Ilouschka, while Ladislaus, springing forward, with flashing eyes, implores the Abbess to remain and listen; and Friedrich, encircled by the nuns, is helped towards the convent.

Ladislaus eagerly, the forest maiden timidly, cling to Hildegarde's hands, and surprise her with the news that this poor stranger is not the peasant child he seems. Less sanguine than they, she half doubts the fact, in the absence of all names whereby to trace the boy's parentage, but bids Ladislaus follow her to hold counsel with his mother. Ilouschka implores the Mother Superior to permit her to pass the short summer night sleeping in the garden, for she cannot breathe between those high convent walls. Hildegarde, somewhat sadly, grants the one precious boon of freedom which the long imprisoned Abbess may bestow, and goes out, followed by Ladislaus, eagerly scanning her melancholy face.

Ilouschka, alone on the stage, abuses her opportunities by playfully skipping round the garden, singing a German poem she had had to recite in class (unaccompanied by the musicians, who, with Herr Schulze, look on amazed at this unexpected interlude, while the audience, who decidedly prefer the comic and spectacular to the emotional, applaud with zest), then flings her slight, graceful form down among the fir trees near the chapel, while the musicians, relieved (like poor, quivering Kate behind the scenes) to find the fair gypsy's vagaries at an end, strike up some wild, melancholy Hungarian strain during the brief pause which follows.

The night grows darker as the "stage-moon" sets behind the garden wall; the silent enclosure is all faint and shadowy, save for the one bright gleam of scarlet from the gypsy's figure reclining yonder. Ilouschka suddenly starts up at the sound of a low, wailing cry.

She recognizes the voice of Zara, who again wanders, seeking Friedrich. The gypsies, meeting her, have told her how he has sought shelter in the cloister; and she now stands knocking at the gate.

Agatha hurries into the garden, grumbling at Ilouschka, whom she accuses of being in league with gypsy robbers, and refuses to unlock the door. The maiden, roguishly asking whether she would like to dance another *Csardàs*, snatches the huge key from the leathern girdle of the angry portress, and herself admits Zara, who marches past the laughing girl and the terrified nun, until she pauses in the center of the stage. Her bold demand that her grandson shall be restored to her is met by Ilouschka declaring, with equal boldness, that she knows how vain a claim upon the child is hers, and, flinging her strong young arms round the wild gypsy to detain her, she adjures Agatha to fasten the gate and summon the Abbess at once.

Agatha grumblingly complies, and hastens away. Zara stands vainly struggling with

Ilouschka, and suddenly drawing a long knife from beneath her garments, brandishes it above the girl's head. The bright blade flashes in the light of the torches carried by the eight nuns who enter from the right and range themselves in a row across the background.

Other dark-robed figures noiselessly follow, filing off on either side, till their unfolding ranks disclose the pale and stately Abbess, who, slowly advancing towards the center of the stage, remains standing motionless in the torchlight that shimmers upon the large silver cross, her badge of office, hanging by a broad white ribbon on her breast. Zara's uplifted hand sinks down; the glittering knife falls with a clang upon the ground.

Calmly the young Abbess tells the angry gypsy that they all know how Friedrich, now sleeping peacefully within the cloister, is not hers; and that her only way of escaping the penalty due to her crime is to utter a full confession of the whole.

Zara raises her fierce gray head and asks whether Hildegarde takes her to be a common thief, like Tarscha's band in the forest. It was no mean thirst for gain, but love for the fair, unconscious child, whom she had saved from drowning at the risk of her own life, that tempted the bereaved old woman into keeping him. Seizing the hand of the Abbess, she

draws her farther forwards, gazing with her deep, searching eyes—the eyes of a gypsy seeress—into Hildegarde's melancholy face. “Thou, desolate one in the cloister, canst thou not pity the desolate? Would'st thou seek to hide thy soul from the glance of the gypsy, who reads in thine eyes how wildly the woman's heart still throbs beneath the black convent garb? Grant me one moment's rich compassion, as from woman to woman—and let the Abbess judge me as she will.”

And she wildly utters a confession, ending with the name of the boy's parents—*Von Altheim*—broken by a cry of joy from Hildegarde, as she exclaims, in tumultuous thanksgiving, that the boy's mother is even now within the cloister.

The gypsy runs her piercing eyes across the rows of dark-veiled figures, mute and motionless in the torchlight, and asks whether the mother of Friedrich be among them, driven by grief into this living tomb.

The nuns are silent. Zara cries out that the mother cannot be there, for, even were she taking the solemn vows before the altar, such tidings would make her cast her veil aside and hasten forth in ecstasy. Hildegarde interrupts her. It is no cloistered and imprisoned nun, but the beautiful German stranger to whom these tidings shall be brought—brought by the

lips of the young Abbess, whose acting, like that of the gypsy at this crisis, soars into a region of genuine human feeling into which the audience, largely composed of mothers, are fortunately able to follow. "And this poor, empty, joyless hand, accustomed only to bestowing alms at yonder gate, shall now bestow life's richest happiness, and lead the child to his mother"—then, suddenly dropping the hands she has upraised towards the image of the Virgin in glad rejoicing, she stands as if struck by some inward shock, murmuring, half to herself, but not in gladness, "Ah—this poor, empty, joyless hand!"

It is Zara, the guilty one, held there for judgment, whose sympathy with the desolate young Abbess shows so clearly in her face. Woman face to face with woman—there they stand, divided by impassible barriers, yet in their heart of hearts reaching forth hands to each other. Frau Schulze, could she have had her way, would have developed this scene beyond the outlines which lack of time restricted it to—but the long act must be drawn to a close. Zara is told that, having once saved the boy, she may depart, unpunished, but, though she kneels, imploring Hildegarde to suffer her to behold him for one moment ere she returns to her solitary hut in the forest, the Abbess bids her, instead of heavier penalty, to take a solemn

oath that she never again will cross Friedrich's path.

Before the shrine beside the chapel the gypsy utters her vow, in a tableau greatly admired, and exciting much mirth behind the scenes among all who are perforce reminded of the way wherein Miss Clive had extracted a promise of keeping the peace from Julia & Co. The gate of the garden is thrown open. The gypsy turns away, with a long glance of unspoken sorrow and sympathy towards Hildegarde, and, shrouding her fierce gray head in the crimson mantle, slowly moves across the torchlit stage and out into the dark night, to the sounds of low, sad music.

The Abbess stands silently looking after her until, starting at the harsh clang of the gate as it is closed by Agatha, she bids the nuns to follow her into the chapel to pray for that wild, lawless spirit; and, as they pass across the stage in dark procession, the torch-bearers falling last into the ranks, while Ilouschka, motionless at one side, gazes upon Hildegarde's still, melancholy face, the curtain falls.

ACT FOURTH.

No change of scene being required, the convent garden is soon displayed in the light of early morning. On the stone bench sits the Abbess, and facing her stands Christine, the

maid of Countess von Altheim, and formerly the nurse of Friedrich, whom she has looked upon as he slept and identified beyond doubt. She burns to hasten to her mistress with the happy tidings, but the Abbess replies that it is she herself, by virtue of her office, to whom this charge must fall, and, bidding her to keep silence, dismisses her. Rising and pacing to and fro, Hildegarde briefly reviews the strange events of the past night. Her heart is filled by a wild mixture of joy, and innocent envy, and thankfulness. Amid all this the dark image of the fierce, desolate, guilty, yet remorseful gypsy woman floats unceasingly before the Abbess, who, herself unused to happiness, finds her thoughts straying from the fair Countess to the lonely outcast. Her speech (greatly improved by Frau Schulze) ends with a wild lament that her own joyless existence may never sweep away into

“More life, and fuller,”

on the tide of swiftly succeeding events and deep human interests which has now beat so suddenly against the convent walls in the heart of the dark forest.

Ladislaus enters, radiant with gladness, earnestly beseeching the Abbess to grant him the boon of being the first to inform Friedrich of his real parentage. Hildegarde gladly

consents, and departs to seek the boy. The young Magyar, meanwhile, is joined by Ilouschka, and Kate's final torment of being forced to see comedy thrust headlong into the midst of her own fancies is renewed in the brief dialogue between these unruly though spirited actresses, who mercilessly abuse their opportunity, and charm the spectators, as before. Their talk is cut short by the return of Hildgarde, leading Friedrich, and beckoning to Ilouschka to follow her. Fanny, behind the scenes, had to listen to a serious protest from Grace Howard against putting Kate into misery any more.

"She ought to be grateful, rather than indignant!" exclaimed Fanny. "She ought to know that any audience, even at a school play, want something else than gypsies, and goblins, and sentiment, and all the fantastic German stuff that she adores. You'll see, girls, Kate Armstrong is terribly slow, and childish, and backward in some things, though she is so clever in others; and, when she's older, she won't seem nearly so bright as she does now, for her lack of versatility will show the more when she has not her extreme youth any longer for an excuse."

"I don't think that just now, when she has got up this play, which you know very well that neither you nor Verena, with all your versa-

tility, nor anybody else, would have dreamed of attempting without her, is the time to accuse Kate of being slow, or childish, or backward," said Grace, with some asperity.

The brief scene between the boys is carried off with much spirit on the part of Ladislaus, and feeling on that of Friedrich, whose outburst of glad emotion is interrupted by the ringing of the bell for matins. The nuns file across the stage; last of all comes the Abbess, who bids the children to follow them, while she remains to break the joyful news to Bertha von Altheim, who now enters, full of thanks for the hospitality she has enjoyed, and speaking of the eagerness with which she leaves this tranquil spot to hasten to the camp and to "meet him from whom she has been parted for so long."

The Abbess echoes her words with another meaning, thinking of the long-lost son. Her anxious eyes and solemn earnestness of tone excite the fears of Bertha, who fancies her hostess (almost overcome by the strangeness of her unwonted mission, full of tremulous and painful joy to one whose daily tasks are but the monotonous and dreary duties of a cloister) to be about to break to her some evil tidings. Hildegarde, unable to control herself any longer, flings her arms round Bertha, adjuring her to be strong to bear the shock of happiness.

Again the laurels of the scene are due to

Grace Howard, for Agnes Leslie, naturally timid before an audience, instead of rising to the height of intense feeling demanded by her rôle, throughout the whole looks and acts too much like a gentle, startled young girl. Glad to escape from the gaze of the spectators, she hides her face upon Hildegarde's shoulder, her bright hair shining out against the dark robes of the Abbess, whose features quiver as she tells the tale. It is not death, but life that makes her tremble. Here, amid the deathlike stillness of the cloister, in the shadowy garden, where, beyond the chapel, she can see the white grave-stones of the dead sisters glimmering through the firs, shall rise this wondrous joy for Bertha, still clinging to Hildegarde, whose full, ringing voice falters as she relates the confession and departure of old Zara. The deep, rolling music from the chapel that from time to time accompanies the dialogue again bursts forth.

Hildegarde and Bertha remain motionless. Ladislaus appears at the door of the chapel, holding Friedrich's hand, but, at a sign from the Abbess, instantly retires, after leading his half-hesitating companion to the center of the stage. Bertha's face is still hidden on the shoulder of Hildegarde, who suddenly unclasps her clinging hands, and hurriedly withdraws into the background. "Thou hast no further need of me! Thy son stands here before thee."

Friedrich, no longer hesitating, rushes into the outstretched arms of his mother, who, as she clasps him, sinks upon her knees with a ringing cry of joy, and slowly, her face drooping upon his shoulder, bends lower till, but for his supporting hands, she would fall upon the ground.

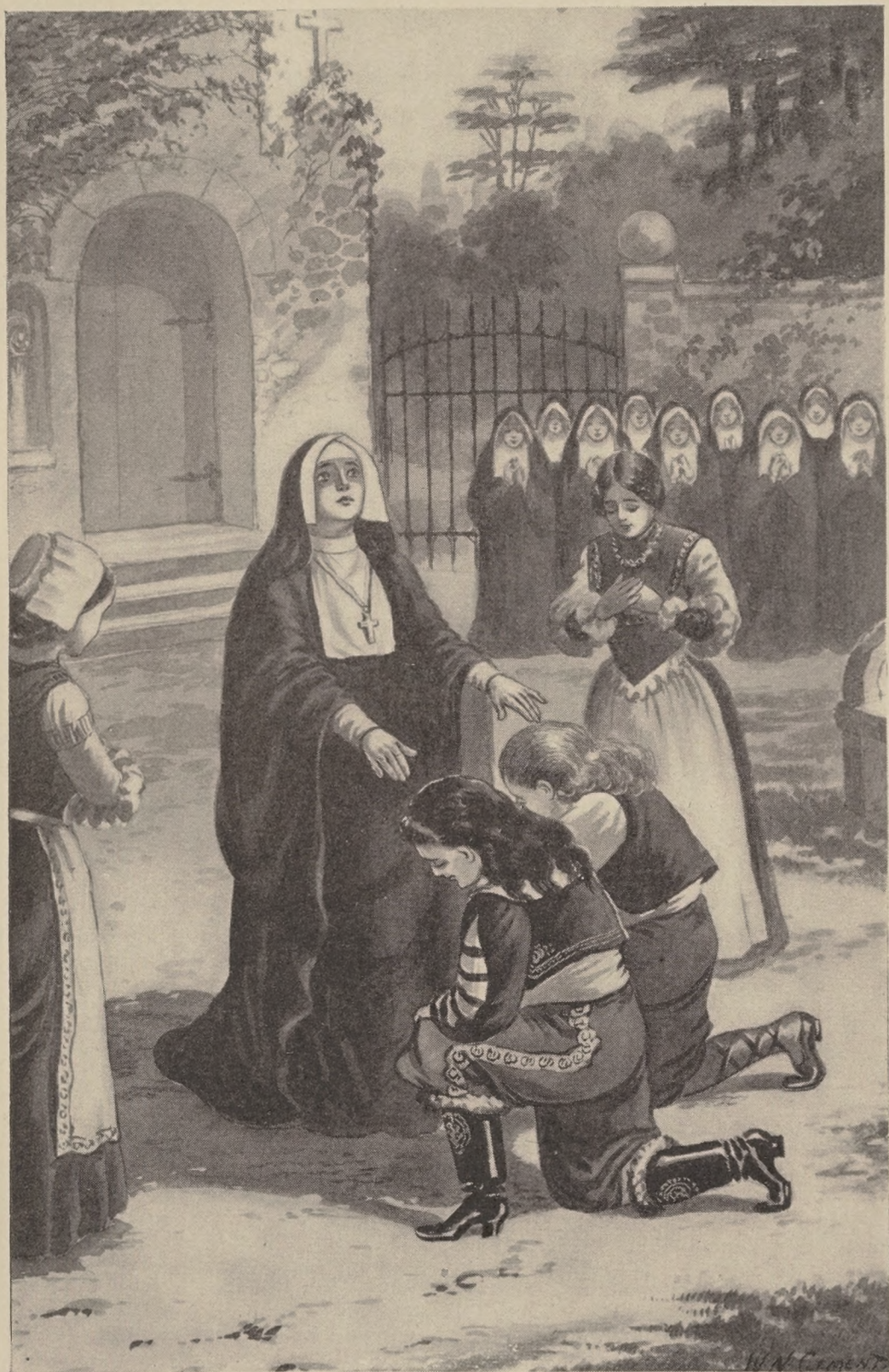
Nervous enough as to her success at this crisis, Kate's excitability, so rebuked by Miss Clive, stands her in good stead, since she unintentionally does the very best thing by forgetting herself altogether, and weeping in earnest, the scene being mainly carried through by the pantomime and the organ music. The Abbess, lingering a moment in the background, slowly ascends the steps of the chapel, extends her hand as if in benediction towards the mother and her child, and vanishes within the dark doorway, to be met behind the door by Frau Schulze, sobbing with excited sympathy and memories of the little son she had left buried on the banks of the Rhine, before she had left the Fatherland, so long ago.

Hildegarde's work is not yet done. Out from the chapel bursts a jubilant psalm of thanksgiving, scarcely dying away before it is blent with the sudden clash of martial music. Bertha starts, and lifts up her radiant face, while Friedrich wonders at those wild sounds rising on the morning air beyond the garden, from the

soldiers sent to escort his mother. The chapel door opens. Hildegarde appears, followed by the nuns, who range themselves round the stage, while Agatha, entering from the convent, brings a letter that, handed to the Abbess, is given by her to her guest.

Bertha reads it with a cry of joy. Her husband, recovering, writes that a noble prisoner has fallen into his hands, the Count Zrinyi, falsely believed to have perished in battle, but who, discovered wounded and senseless, is now being restored to health. Hildegarde departs to tell the Hungarians, while Bertha fills up the brief interval by promising Ilouschka that she will protect her until her marriage with her lover, whose name, when bashfully and coquetishly mentioned by the pretty gypsy (at whom old Agatha scowls for her impropriety in venturing to talk about him within the sanctuary), as in dramatic duty bound proves to be that of a brave young soldier in Count Zrinyi's troop, who was mentioned as having been made a prisoner along with his master, whom he had helped to find upon the field.

The music from without begins anew as the stately form of Hildegarde appears, leading in the now radiant Hungarian lady and her son. They are to accompany the von Altheims to the town garrisoned by the Allies, from which the Hungarians had fled in sorrow only a few



The Bond of Friendship.

days before. As the two rejoicing women turn towards the silent Mother Superior in glad thanksgiving, Ladislaus reminds her of a Greek custom, called "The Bond of Friendship," whereby two youths, who desire to go through life like brethren, are, as it were, consecrated to their future fellowship by the blessing that some maiden, dear to both, shall invoke upon them. He himself and Friedrich would fain implore the Abbess to bless them, in solemn witness to this bond, before they go.

They are but children—and Hildegarde is no young, joyous maiden who has been their playmate—yet it is from her hand, all unaccustomed to bestowing joy, that they feel that they have received their new happiness. The Abbess has regained her sad composure; yet her voice trembles as she utters the benediction that they implore ere they depart into the wide, wondrous life that calls to them from across the convent threshold she herself may never pass, and bids them keep this hour in remembrance, together with this memory of her who hath no link with any earthly future save in the echo, in their own hearts, of the parting words that now she speaks; and, as she clasps the children's hands together, and stretches out her own in blessing on their heads, the curtain falls.

CHAPTER XIV.

PRIDE AND VAINGLORY.

CHILDISH and fantastic though it was, the little drama was not allowed to close without fresh tributes of approval from the indulgent audience, and when, at a sign from Frau Schulze, the curtain just lowered was raised to give a final glimpse of the scene, Kate's ecstasy was so intense that she could scarcely keep from sobbing. She hardly saw how Herr Schulze, beaming with delight, rose from his seat in the orchestra and flung three large wreaths of wild laurel at her own, Grace Howard's and Verena's feet. When the curtain was let down, after a long pause, during which the solemn music was almost drowned by the universal clapping of hands, everything swam before her and she clung to Grace, gasping, "Oh, I'm so happy! Nothing went wrong and nobody broke down. We must take these wreaths upstairs and keep them forever."

Frau Schulze, exclaiming that her dear child was quite "*freudetrunken*," intoxicated with joy, tried to calm her; but Fanny and Verena took matters into their own hands by each

seizing an arm of Kate and dragging her off the stage, where the Marsh King and Will-o'-the-Wisps were dancing a polka with the nuns and gypsies, through a side passage and out into the garden. The late afternoon light was slanting on the tall cedars. Kate looked up, breathing more freely as she dropped upon a seat, crying, "How calm, and still, and peaceful it seems out here! I should like just to fling myself down upon the grass and sleep."

"Which means that you're thoroughly exhausted," said Fanny. "I knew you'd collapse fast enough when you came out here. Come up and rest."

"We all have to go," said Verena, springing to her feet. "I should like to be among the audience as they disperse, to be complimented on my acting, but the General ordered us to march straight upstairs at once."

Kate ceased to object and suffered herself to be hurried off to her alcove, finding the long, quiet dormitory, glowing in the sunset light, soon filled by a motley troop whom Miss Almira vainly tried to sober down by her commands not to be noisy, as they divested themselves of their stage apparel and, obeying the spirit rather than the letter of Miss Clive's orders to seek repose before dressing for the evening, gathered together to talk in whispers. Verena darted into Fanny's nook, too much elated to

feel fatigue; but Kate, taking off her boy's costume, flung herself on her bed, and instantly fell into a sound sleep, from which she was roused by Agnes, a tea-tray in her hand. A light was burning, but the dormitory seemed deserted, while the hum of voices greeted Kate's ears from below as she sprang up, exclaiming, "Am I late, then, after all?"

"I hated to rouse you," said Agnes, "but you are my stage-child to-night, so I gained permission to let you sleep through tea-time. Get up and eat this food, and let me help you dress. The others are down."

"Ran off and let me sleep like a dormouse, did they?" growled Kate, between her hurried mouthfuls. "Kind, when they knew how I didn't want to lose a single moment! Verena might have done me the favor of giving me a friendly pull—but she's led by Fanny now."

"Fanny and Verena have had a large share in helping your play to succeed," admonished Agnes, as she smoothed out her small friend's wild locks. "You had better keep on good terms with them both."

"Yes; but it was so uncommonly like them to be ready to help me in any way that's fanciful, and pretty, and redounds to their own credit, and yet never dream of stopping to waken me, or help me in anything that's merely useful, and don't concern themselves," moral-

ized Kate, with more to the same effect as she finished eating and suffered Agnes to array her in her thin white frock, with scarlet ribbons. "Clasp my locket, please, my fingers tremble. There's the music. Oh, how I hate to be the last!"

Spite of all efforts, the dancing was about to begin when they entered the room. Kate's excitement was beginning to suffer a reaction, and she whispered, "How I wish Mrs. Hill had not refused to let us wear our stage dresses to-night! Then I wouldn't have felt shy."

"You would have had to dance with girls; and I want you to be my brother Bernard's partner for this set of Lancers," replied Agnes, keeping hold of her small friend until she had secured the above-mentioned youth and sent him off with Kate; while even the gentle Mrs. Leslie was scarcely able to repress a smile as she saw the sheepishness which suddenly overcame her godchild like a spell as she nervously walked down the long room, holding the arm of her cavalier for the nonce.

He was a comely, bright-looking fellow of sixteen, not very tall, but seeming far too manly for such a diminutive girl as Kate, who had not seen him for two years, and felt glad that the dancing left little time for talking just now. She was somewhat proud of having a boy for her partner, as the slight sprinkling of "the

opposite sex'' among the guests, as usual, consisted of the brothers and cousins of some of the pupils, and a few remarkably solemn-looking youths from Herr Schulze's seminary, who, though not present at the theatricals, had been invited to honor the evening's festivities. The good Professor, now exerting himself heroically in aiding Mrs. Hill and her staff to entertain the company, had been so everlastingly plied by the "General" with fluent orations concerning the great desirability of teaching young ladies and gentlemen to converse with each other, mingled with repeated warnings to suffer none but the mildest and most innocent lambs from his fold to enter hers, that the choice had inevitably fallen upon some of the dullest and least available of his flock, who awkwardly huddled together in a forlorn knot until Herr Schulze traversed the room with his short, quick step, and, laying his squat, strong hand on the shoulder of his intended victim, propelled him by main force from his ignominious retreat and landed him beside the young lady destined to become his partner in the dance, who generally proved lively enough for them both.

The stirring music of the Lancers exhilarated Kate; and it was not until the set broke up and she found herself marching up and down with her companion that she, as she candidly told herself, burst out into the full bloom of her

stupidity. Bernard Leslie seemed a little shy, and it increased her own shyness tenfold. How she longed to be able to dash into a lively talk about nothing, or to run away from him and seek congenial fun among the Thistles yonder. How bored she felt; how immeasurably inferior this so-called amusement seemed to anything wherein her own invention could find play. Kate felt even more flat and unimportant than she had done while watching the *Csardàs*, which, by the way, she often heard the guests round her mentioning as the gem of the performance. What a contrast this was to the romance, and stir, and buoyant happiness of a few hours ago! Oh, that she were "Friedrich" once more, dancing with the goblins, sleeping in the vision, or appearing on the wall, with the red light of the torches flashing round her, and the music bursting out so loud and wild! Then she had felt gay, and strong, and confident—how provoking that she might not have worn her stage dress and danced with girls, instead of being bothered with a boy to talk to!

The boy, however, was a good dancer, and Kate, as he led her away to a set just forming for the "Prince Imperial," felt rather elated at still having him for her partner, especially as many of her friends had no cavaliers at all. She grew so desperate, so conscious of the all-observing eyes of Julia & Co., so afraid lest

Verena, urged on by Fanny, might tease her when the guests had departed, that she gave up trying to be sensible, and plunged headlong into a not very wise but exceedingly animated conversation upon school-life, which Bernard took up with boyish eagerness, treating her to the recital of sundry pranks at his own academy, and enjoying her voluble yarns, wherein, it is to be feared, that neither Mrs. Hill, Miss Clive, nor the other teachers figured with that awe-inspiring dignity and reputation for knowledge, wisdom and justice to which they would have considered themselves entitled.

“One thing, Miss Kate,” began Bernard, their talk having naturally strayed to the performance, “I fancied your play seemed ‘cut’ now and then.”

“Oh, yes!” cried the wronged dramatist. “Just after the second act, who should appear but Miss Clive with a message from Mrs. Hill, which I know she had put into her head, saying that the play must be shortened, because so much time had been taken up by the dancing, and the audience would be impatient to get back to town for tea. We were terribly scared and held a council of war, and Frau Schulze settled that half of the scene between the Abbess and Countess Bertha must be left out. I was furious; for, you see, the Countess was to have told Hildegarde how she had lost her eldest

child by his falling into a river, and it would have smoothed the way for the old gypsy's confession, which was made to come off so suddenly, with half of what I wrote left out. And, in the fourth act, they omitted ever so much. I couldn't help thinking that my play, as it was acted, was like 'Wallenstein's Horse' in 'The Foreign Tour of Brown, Jones and Robinson'—don't you remember how they were told that the head, neck and three of the legs, and a good deal more, had been restored, but that 'all the rest is the original horse?' I'm so glad you noticed it—I have been woefully overruled all through."

"How beastly!" exclaimed Bernard, in his boyish sympathy using the forbidden adjective which his schoolmates considered expressive of the ultimatum of disgust. "I was sure, too, that the scene where the lost child is restored had been hurried up, though my mother, who, by the way, was crying hard all through it—a compliment to you, Miss Kate, and Agnes, too—declared that it must be all right."

"Oh, did *she* cry! I *do* feel honored! Yes, it was dreadfully shortened, and we left out a whole scene between Friedrich and his former nurse, who was to have rushed in and greeted him, while Hildegarde goes to tell the Hungarians that Count Zrinyi is alive. But I was so glad that all the shouting from the gypsy

men, when Friedrich climbs over the wall, went off properly. We couldn't advertise for 'outside shouts' like some manager, who put such a list in the paper, beginning with 'Dead bodies, outside shouts,' and I forget what else they wanted 'supes' for. But Herr Schulze stood behind the wall, leading off Jake and Sandy in the masculine yells the girls couldn't have managed. He had great work at rehearsals to prevent Jake from howling so as to betray 'the cullud pusson,' and to keep Sandy from shrieking in broad Scotch. He tried to teach them some German word, only, of course, they forgot everything except giving a good, loud yell, and the Professor's voice drowned theirs."

"How I wish I might have been allowed to come in there and howl away to help the grand effect," said Bernard eagerly. "I was wishing, anyhow, that you had written some part for a fellow of my age, which Mrs. Hill would have let me enjoy acting along with you."

"Oh!" cried Kate, delighted. "Can't I see her face, or Miss Clive's, at the bare suggestion! I daresay she'd allow Herr Schulze to act some sort of old stage-father; but we didn't want his stoutness in such narrow quarters, and he was perfectly invaluable behind the scenes, shouting and looking after the stage-moon. That was his own invention. He cut a crescent-shaped hole in a dark window-shade and cov-

ered it with yellow silk, with the light of a lamp, placed close behind it, shining through. When he wanted it to set, he pulled down the shade very slowly, and at rehearsals it creaked so that we said it wasn't 'all silently the little moon drops down behind the sky.' If it hadn't been for the Schulzes my play would never have been anything, for it was really they who put it through."

The Professor's square figure now appeared crossing the room with an air of pleased importance as he directed his steps towards a sheepish youth of about seventeen, Fritz Bachmann, plainest, most thoroughly bashful and uncomfortable of the unfortunate lads who had been dragged to Mount Cedar in his train. Perceiving that his pupil had not stirred from the corner wherein he had taken shelter on his arrival, Herr Schulze saw fit to reward him for his patient martyrdom by hauling him forth to present to Kate, whom he described to the young German as a Fräulein who would speak *Deutsch* with him as long as he desired. The Professor's slow progress across the room, one hand upon the shoulder of his shrinking captive, the other wildly gesticulating in air as he strove by verbal arguments to keep up the poor boy's courage, caught the attention of Bernard Leslie, who exclaimed, "Here's a terrible pair making directly for us, Miss Kate,

an elderly Goth and a young Vandal—what shall we do?”

“Hush, don’t laugh at Herr Schulze, he’s so nice, as I’ve just been telling you—and he stood godfather for me, with your mother”——

Kate stopped, half-alarmed as her godfather drew near. She did not want to get rid of Bernard now. Luckily for her, Fritz Bachmann stood still at a little distance, extricating himself with a jerk from the Professor’s grasp, awed less by the Fräulein’s childish aspect than by the sight of Bernard, who, checking his impulse to laugh, struggled hard to reduce his countenance to a properly calm and vacant expression as he bent down over Kate’s chair, desperately rattling off a string of nonsense nowise relating to Fritz, who fancied, all the same, that he was being held up to ridicule. Herr Schulze stepped forward.

“My godchild,” he began benignly in German, addressing Kate by the title which he thought should serve as a bond of union between them. Kate glanced up into his mild blue eyes with a look of mingled roguishness and anxiety he had never seen on her face before. He stroked his thick brown beard (the Professor was not many years past fifty, though the girls considered him a patriarch), and resumed, in his own tongue:

“I have brought with me a young scholar

who has not long left the Fatherland, and is very shy, and I have promised him that I will present him to my dear godchild, who will talk German to him," he said, with a supplicating look that gradually wandered off to include poor Bachmann, still holding in helpless misery aloof.

For the first time in her existence Kate was guilty of a piece of feminine artfulness in order to gain her ends.

"Fräulein Forster speaks German far better than I, and could amuse him far more—and this young English gentleman does not speak it much, and it might not seem civil to him to leave off talking his own language," said Kate, with glowing cheeks, feeling guilty of ingratitude towards her kind friend, yet unable to repress a sense of mischievous joy at thus keeping Bernard, astonishing Herr Schulze and perhaps punishing Verena for sundry small provocations by having the forlornity thrust upon her hands. But Kate was a novice in this sort of thing, and felt overwhelmed with shame the instant she had spoken. She had not courage to remain, but, hurriedly rising, caught Bernard's arm and hastily turned away from the wondering Professor, moving past the guests until she and her much-amused companion had left the dancing-room, and stood on the long, lighted porch at the top of the steps.

“We mustn’t go down into the garden. Mrs. Hill doesn’t approve of moonlight flirtations, you know.”

“You did settle that old Professor pretty thoroughly, judging by his looks,” laughed Bernard, who, like all his sex, felt much more inclined to respect Kate since he had seen her resolute action to ward off poor Bachmann and keep himself. He had thought her rather slow at first, but she had grown quite amusing now. He was a very good young fellow, but not troubled by any of his sister’s over-conscientiousness, and considered Kate’s flight from Herr Schulze and Fritz as a capital joke.

“He thinks me dreadfully rude, I know,” sighed Kate, divided between penitence and mirth.

“He’s a bear-leader anyhow, isn’t he? He has the regular professional look written all over him,” said Bernard, feeling as though the fact of Herr Schulze being a schoolmaster must render him a sort of natural enemy to youth in general, whom he and Kate were justified in keeping at a proper distance, during the festal occasion at least.

“Oh, but he’s so nice; he wanted me to make my own part stronger, with a scene for Friedrich with Zara—wasn’t Helen Palmer perfectly splendid as the old gypsy—he said I had not enough to do, and that Verena had rather too

much. Miss Clive means to have him here next year to teach Greek. We have only lady teachers now; we're like the girls in Tennyson's *Princess*, and I'm sure Miss Clive is the image of Ida. I wonder whether somebody like the Prince will come and carry her off. I would be glad, for her sake, but we would miss her horribly, for she's so stirring, and handsome, and approves of acting, and''——

Kate's excitement led her to raise her voice as they passed the window of a class-room now thrown open to the company.

"Acting!" repeated "Foxey's" well-known tones, as her dark, handsome head appeared leaning forward among several Thistles, trying not to laugh. "Are you there, Kate, to rehearse the balcony scene in 'Romeo and Juliet?'"

"Are you posted, there, Fanny, for the sake of eavesdropping, and trying your skill as Lady Teazle?" retorted Kate, whose acquaintance with the 'School for Scandal,' it should be said, consisted in a hurried glancing over the play during the holidays at her uncle's, where she formed intimate and unchecked friendships with many books which her teachers would have preferred to see reserved for future years. None of the group around Fanny understood the allusion, but the name of Lady Teazle struck them as being so remarkably well suited to their

spokeswoman that Kate found she had uttered a rejoinder which was received with a laugh of genuine and sympathizing applause.

The shallow and childish merriment sent the blood tingling through her veins with satisfaction at having held her own, and turned the tables on her clever classmate for once. Bernard, too, seemed even more amused than he had been by her conduct towards Fritz, and gratified her by showing no inclination to linger and cultivate Fanny's society, but drew her on back into the hall. Kate had desired to talk a little with Mrs. Leslie (the sole stranger present who took any especial interest in her), but on reaching the door beheld, with dismay, that the gentle, soft-voiced English lady was holding an apparently confidential conversation with Elisabeth, which Kate's imagination instantly converted into a series of solemn complaints against herself. Bernard's quick brown eyes sparkled with mirth as he watched the sudden change pass over her face.

"Come back," she half-whispered. "I daren't go in! I know I'm being held up to reprobation. I wish Elisabeth would be satisfied with her crop of prizes and depart, instead of staying until autumn, to worry us. I'm afraid to go near your mother now for fear of being lectured."

"My mother isn't so fond of lecturing as to

be bothering people in the midst of a party," laughed Bernard, as he led Kate across the hall into a small room, where the mild refreshments allotted to festivities at Mount Cedar stood during the evening; and they proceeded to compare notes upon the fertile topic of getting into scrapes and being lectured in a style which hardly requires further mention, until a sudden sound of music was heard, causing Kate to start.

"They are going to have the last dance, a Virginia reel, in the hall," she exclaimed, eager, of course, to retain triumphant possession of her partner, and quite uneasy lest the services which he, as a gentleman, was just now obliged to render to a knot of unescorted damsels, who rushed in, *sans façon*, to get some cake and lemonade, should result in his being cleverly seized and carried off before her eyes. "Miss Clive won't allow any but simple dances except on the stage; you know she glories in keeping us children as long as possible, and I enjoy it. Only she looked so solemn, and said, 'Nothing but square dances can be permitted,' when some one asked leave to have the polka mazurka to-night, and"—Kate's words received an apparent contradiction in the sudden entrance of Verena and Brownie, who came dancing an impromptu polka into the room, and, whirling round merrily, stood still just inside the open door.

“Kate,” began Verena, ignoring Bernard, but quietly taking in every detail, “can you come with me to Fanny for just one moment?”

“Not I,” answered Kate, certain that some trick must be in prospect, as she settled herself on the sofa, determined not to be so simple as to leave Bernard exposed to the combined fascinations of several pretty girls while she obeyed a summons likely to result in her discomfiture and in having to dance the reel with a Thistle after all. “What is it?”

“Only something which you would be sorry to miss,” quietly added the Hungarian, in her full, vibrating voice. “Something connected with ‘the days when we went gypsying’—so you had better go.”

Verena somewhat mystified Kate as she stood there, like a picture framed by the doorway, in her white dress and red ribbons, her graceful arms outspread against the woodwork, her dark hair looking blacker and more lustrous than ever beneath the shimmer of an old-fashioned silver round comb once belonging to her mother, while she nodded her head and beat time with one beautiful little foot to the music from beyond.

Kate hesitated; then glanced at Brownie, who met the unspoken question with her clear honest eyes, merely saying, “You had better go.”

“I must ask you to take me,” began Kate to

Bernard with an *aplomb* which took her school-mates by surprise as he gave her his arm. Verena, mutely stepping aside to let them pass, felt her estimate of Kate rise several degrees, since both she and Brownie had come prepared to see her rush off at the first hint of anything exciting, and may possibly have looked upon Bernard as a prize likely to revert to themselves. Eager to see what would happen next, the couple sped along the hall, preceded by a guide awaiting them in the shape of the merry Thistle who had acted the Marsh King, and who, saying something hardly heard amid the talk and music, led them into a small room, where, to her surprise, Kate beheld Fanny seated at a table, with writing materials, encircled by a crowd of the German troupe, whose presence, no longer a bore, seemed to her a sort of protection from any very atrocious teasing they might have in store.

“Well, *Friedrich*,” began Fanny, glancing at her audience, struggling not to laugh; “not even your recent change of rôle could prevent you from obeying my summons; so I still have hopes that you have not forgotten our adventures in the forest before you undertook to burst out into a young lady all at once, for you seem to have added on to your age the four years you dropped when you were frisking round the stage this afternoon as a boy of ten”——

How much further this raillery, but for Bernard's presence, might have been carried was the question so absorbing Kate that she did not even trouble herself to reply to the mild banter with which her friend treated her for a few moments until, suddenly exchanging her provoking tone for a business-like one, "Foxey" went on briskly:

"And now for the subject in hand. We have drawn up a sort of Round Robin to Mrs. Hill, asking leave to have ourselves photographed in twelve striking scenes from your play, before breaking up. We club together to defray expenses, and we each get three sets—here's the list; and you are made prominent in every place where Friedrich possibly can be; so don't be jealous at our getting so much glory by our dance. We have been asked several times by strangers to point out 'the little girl who got it all up;' and Frau Schulze has been sounding your praises while you were running about, and Agnes said her mother wrote a long inscription on the fly-leaf of her printed copy about its being the work of her dear godchild, and"—Kate, heartily delighted, heard no more, for Bernard Leslie slyly put in with remarks referring to "Wallenstein's Horse," which made her shake with laughter, while her eyes devoured the written list. She was in her own beloved, dramatic, ideal world once more.

“Well!” broke in Verena, “what do you say? If Mrs. Hill consents we will send for that little German photographer in town to come here to-morrow and take us before the stage is pulled down. And, if there’s time, we mean to wind up with a grand group of us all—Zara, Countesses, Abbess, nuns, gypsies, Will-o’-the-Wisps and ‘supers’ standing together, with you and me on either side of the Marsh King in the foreground.”

“Where’s the Round Robin?—Grace and Agnes have signed; so I needn’t hesitate,” cried Kate, adding her name to the numerous signatures; then, taking Bernard’s arm as a matter of course, was proudly hurried out into the hall, beginning to be filled by couples for the Virginia reel, exulting to find herself marched up to a place near the top, from which post of honor, rare to any save the elder girls, she beheld her schoolmates straying in, with or without gentlemen, but usually without.

“You can’t complain of not getting jolly good larks, Miss Kate,” said Bernard, from across the ranks. “I wish my own school ever was as jolly. Oh—look, that doleful chap you ran away from is happy at last!”

Kate, looking round, saw Fritz Bachmann solemnly advancing up the hall with Miss Dorinda hanging on his arm, evidently much gratified at having gained a gentleman for a

partner, since she was apt either to be crowded out altogether, or else obliged to pair off with one of the smaller girls. The melancholy Fritz, when so cruelly headed off from being entertained by Kate, had been seized anew by the Professor and presented to Dorinda, who found him sufficiently available for all the attention she wanted, and consequently enjoyed the unhopèd-for pleasure of being led to a good place in the dance; while Kate inwardly reflected that two young ladies unaccustomed to enjoying much importance were in for an unwonted line of luck this evening, anyhow.

Her spirits were so elated that she capered through the reel like all the stage-goblins broken loose, as Verena whispered to her when they met; and it was well she had some secret gratification, for, as might have been expected, no sooner had the guests departed than she found herself encircled, not merely by Julia & Co., but by all the foremost wags of the Thistles, in their different ways trying to tease her about what they succinctly chose to term her "having set up a beau." Kate, flushed and exhilarated, for once gave small heed to these jokes; and, perched upon the arm of a sofa, with dangling feet, and blonde locks straying over her white dress even more wildly than usual, sat nodding a sarcastic assent or a laughing denial to the chorus of witticisms until they were suddenly

quashed by Miss Clive entering to announce that Mrs. Hill would allow the photographs to be taken, while poor Miss Almira (who had actually allowed herself to sit through the play in a back seat, with great enjoyment of the spectacle, though she did not understand a single word of the dialogue) followed to summon them all to prayers in a rather more dismal mood than usual.

So the photos were taken, including the "grand group," the singular and comic jumble whereof afforded the troupe no end of hearty fun. As for Kate, her spirits had by this time reached such a pitch that she awakened serious anxiety in her godmother, who, though in many things hardly the sort of person likely to gain permanent influence over such a girl, saw that she required a change, and, to Elisabeth's relief and Verena's regret, stoutly overruled all objections and carried off Kate, nothing loth (with Grace Howard, who, as it had been settled, was shortly to accompany the Leslie's to Europe), for a month at their house in Quebec. Kate had spent weeks with them in the quaint old city, in Virginia's time, and the memory of these visits, and the fact that she was removed from teasing, temptation and undue stimulus, united to produce a style of conduct so exemplary that she, for once, contrived to please almost without effort, and

to win approbation of a kind very different from the childish pride and vainglory which had lately been intoxicating her.

CHAPTER XV.

A MOST PRICKLY THISTLE.

KATE being thus happily disposed of, and the greater number of the girls having gone home for the holidays, it now seemed as though things at Mount Cedar ought to settle down into the dull tranquillity apt to follow on the heels of an excitement. Mrs. Hill, sorely exhausted by the fatigue and bustle of the last few weeks, soon departed with her niece for a month's rest and quiet at the seashore. Madame Verrier began to grow *triste*, and gladly accepted an invitation from an old friend, leaving the much-reduced garrison under the charge of little Miss Benson, of another under-teacher and of the poor Dragon, whose holidays were few, all parties feeling at liberty to scatter so long as the untiring "General" remained at her post, which she seldom quitted until August, when Mrs. Hill was expected to return.

But the evil genius of Mount Cedar, which, in one way or another seemed disposed to blight all hopes of peace and order, now ordained that Miss Clive should begin her holiday at least

three weeks earlier than usual by hastening, with Mrs. Hill's permission, to join a married sister, who had just returned from abroad. Her departure was preceded by a brief but characteristic ceremony. Entering the school-room, arm in arm with her head pupil, Elisabeth Armstrong, she, in a short address, informed her astonished scholars that they, for the ensuing month, must yield to Elisabeth the same deference and obedience due to the teachers or to Mrs. Hill herself. She relied upon their sense of honor as gentlewomen in trusting that they would avoid playing childish tricks or causing needless trouble to their mistress, who had kindly consented to act as the assistant of Miss Benson and Miss Almira until the head of the establishment should return. "And if any of you," continued Miss Clive, directing her piercing eyes towards the desk where Verena was sitting, with a slowly increasing scowl upon her dark, beautiful brows, "who have not yet been long enough at this school to have learned that there are offences which even Mrs. Hill's gentleness and forbearance cannot pardon, should deem this a fitting opportunity for the indulgence of that spirit of insubordination which has of late been more than usually rife among you, I will inform such pupils that all breaches of discipline, however unpunished for a time, will be surely

visited, in the end, by their due reward of severe penalties, or by expulsion from the school."

"Hateful! to have that horrid Bess set up to tyrannize over us," was the universal growl among the younger girls at recess; while the Hungarian muttered something supposed to be a vigorous ejaculation of disgust, in her native tongue; and the new *régime* accordingly opened under evil auspices, as indeed any less *exaltée* woman than Miss Clive might have foreseen from the start.

It very soon became evident that whatever benefit the cause of order might derive from the absence of Kate, Fanny and other prominent Thistles would be much more than outweighed by the ceaseless chafing under the rule of this new King Stork kept up by nearly all the girls. The majority of those remaining were madcaps of from eleven to fifteen, who were only too glad to profit by the partial relaxation of discipline to give free vent to their pent-up supply of animal spirits which had been gathering for weeks, but kept within bounds by the dread of examination and fear of exclusion from the dramatic enjoyments. Miss Clive had not been gone three days before Miss Benson felt ready to give up her office in despair, and the poor Dragon's existence grew to be more of a burden to her than ever. Great as were Kate's devices for stirring up the

Thistles to all manner of nonsense in and out of school hours, those of her Magyar friend were still greater, and displayed a teeming originality of invention which might have made Kate feel slightly jealous had she been there to witness them. Brownie had gone, and Verena's chief friend and fellow-agitator for the nonce was Rose Gordon, the youngest pupil, a fine, spirited, nervous, handsome creature of eleven, quite as tall as her daring comrade of fourteen, who was equally at her ease with girls of every age, the few "saints," of course, excepted.

Rose and Verena, therefore, became the leading spirits of Mount Cedar during this unquiet time, exhausting their own wits and the patience of their teachers by that series of meaningless escapades whereby schoolgirls try to keep up a ceaseless protest against all legitimate authority. Miss Benson complained, scolded, but deferred all serious measures until Miss Clive should return. Miss Almira, who, strange though it may seem, had from the first taken a fancy to Verena and was inclined to judge the wild foreign pupil only too leniently, as a natural exception to the others, contented herself with a few lectures on the sinfulness of disobedience, and tried to shut her weary eyes to these misdemeanors as much as possible. But the young assistant, whom Miss Clive's sudden impulse had permitted to assume a

position of importance among girls only a few years her juniors, was of a different kind.

Elisabeth, on the whole, was both morally and mentally superior to the majority of her companions, but strikingly inferior to nearly all in both tact and gentleness. Her Draconian system of government knew no distinction between slight sins of negligence and the most wilful acts of disobedience. The few elder girls murmured, complained to each other, and avoided Elisabeth out of school hours as much as possible, consoling themselves by reflecting that the reign of Queen Bess would not be long. The younger malcontents at first tried to vent their disgust by treating her with open rudeness until, at the suggestion of their leader, they changed their tactics for what they considered a better system of cool, contemptuous defiance which, as they not untruly fancied, must provoke their enemy still further.

“Verena Forster!”

The name fell sharply and swiftly from Elisabeth’s lips as she entered the school-room after hearing a class elsewhere. It was a hot July morning; most of the children sat languidly turning over the leaves of their books or gazing out of the high, open windows. Mrs. Hill used to deplore that the absolute necessity of providing some sedentary occupation to prevent mischief and maintain discipline

compelled her to keep up a certain amount of study through the summer vacation, when her own feelings would have prompted her to allow the girls left at school to enjoy a complete holiday. One tiny, graceful figure, with black, rippling hair, sat bending over a written sheet, rapidly adding a few lines.

“Verena Forster!” Elisabeth reiterated, more sharply than before.

There was no answer. The girls looked on in eager curiosity, while Verena slowly raised her gray, beautiful, yet mournful and defiant eyes.

“Leave off that scribbling and bring it to me this moment, do you hear?” thundered the irate amateur teacher, in her anger so far unmindful of her dignity as to rise from her seat and advance a few steps. “Bring me that writing this moment, or, if you can’t be made to stir, Sophie Howard, at your side, shall carry it up in spite of you.”

“It all looks like nonsense and gibberish,” put in Sophie, glad of a chance to speak, as she carelessly peeped over Verena’s shoulder, and, adroitly seizing the *corpus delicti*, walked with it up to the platform.

“Nonsense and gibberish, indeed, I should think so!” muttered Elisabeth, quite unconscious that the strange-looking manuscript, which she supposed to contain some silly school-

girl *patois*, invented to screen forbidden correspondence, was nothing but a letter in her native Magyar tongue which Verena had been writing to one of the friends she had left behind at the Hungarian seminary where she had spent the happiest portion of her childhood.

“It is not gibberish; it is only your ignorance which makes you think so,” angrily began Verena, rising in her turn, and nervously twirling a pen in her restless fingers. “It is a letter in Hungarian to a friend at home. Mrs. Hill allows me to write them. I had learnt all my lessons and had nothing to do just then. Keep it, if you won’t believe me, till she comes back, and show it to her.”

“I don’t believe you,” growled Elisabeth, glad to find fault with Verena, whom she disliked because of her unsteadiness and unedifying influence over Kate. “You are trying to deceive me—breaking the rules, and scribbling wretched made-up lingo to one of the girls, and trying on all this fine pretence of a Hungarian letter to conceal it. There!” and she tore the paper into fragments. As she held them aloft, about to dash them contemptuously into the waste basket, she uttered a shrill cry, while the uplifted hand fell by her side. Verena, full of blind fury, had flung the pen she was holding at Elisabeth, and the sharp steel point pierced her flesh like an arrow. Miss Almira, entering

the room a few minutes later, found the girls gathered round Elisabeth examining the slight wound, and all talking at once; while the author of the mischief, apparently quite unmoved, was just gathering up the fragments of her ruined epistle from the floor.

A dozen voices were raised in chorus, but Elisabeth's rose stern and clear above them all. "Yes, Miss Almira, this is the girl whom Mrs. Hill allows to remain in the school, to become my sister's chosen friend, and to sow mischief broadcast by her bad example;" while Rose Gordon broke in with a fierce "It was you who began it all, you hateful old piece of conceit, you!" and laughing Sophie, whom nothing could solemnize, uttered jokes at Elisabeth's expense. The others evidently felt anything but compassion for the insult offered to their enemy, although Miss Almira tried to appal the culprit by saying that had the pen been rusty the slight gash in the hand might have produced blood-poisoning; but Verena only compressed her beautifully curved lips still more and leaned against a desk; while Miss Benson (who had just entered) and Elisabeth broke out anew. Almira, seeing that it was worse than useless to seek to make an impression upon the girl before her fellow-pupils, most of whom did not pretend to disguise their sympathy, and not wishing her to become a

heroine, laid her hand on the child's shoulder and gently but firmly led her out of the room.

Verena, half-frightened and half-astonished, followed her teacher across the wide hall and through divers side passages until they reached the small room which was the "Dragon's" own especial sanctum, not far from the kitchen. The poor Dragon just now did not appear to be in her most wrathful mood, for there were tears glittering in her sad hazel eyes as she brought in her prisoner and closed the door.

"My poor child," she began sorrowfully, drawing Verena close to her, while she seated herself upon the chintz-covered sofa, "I fear that the Evil One must be gaining a sad dominion over your immortal soul!"

The "Hungarian Demon," as Fanny Fox had declared that Verena ought to be called when she got into one of her wild moods, instead of bursting out with the torrent of impertinence her teacher had expected, looked up with rather a pleased expression at this peculiar mode of address. It impressed her fancy, and, as she told Kate afterwards, made her feel as though she were like "Sintram" or some character in a fairy tale. Almira mistook the girl's sudden change from sullen silence to listening eagerness for the dawnings of repentance, and went on in the same strain for some minutes; her auditor, relaxing by degrees from her angry

demeanor, would, however, say but little, and that little could hardly be called satisfactory. She expressed no real regret for her conduct, and refused point-blank to make any amends by asking Elisabeth's pardon. The present rebuke was so mild and easy to endure, in comparison with those terrible scoldings with which old Mrs. Forbes had been so often accustomed to plough up the girl's too-sensitive if too-defiant soul, that she heard it with a certain sense of imaginative pleasure, and, mentally treasuring up Almira's favorite phrases about the "powers of darkness," the "sword of faith," and so forth, for Kate's edification, enjoyed the sensation of being a heroine almost as much as if she had stayed in the school-room. Almira, finding that her oration produced no visible effect, departed to hold a council of war with Miss Benson, from which the vengeful Elisabeth was excluded; while Verena curled herself up comfortably upon the sofa whereon the hard-worked Dragon sometimes snatched a respite from her incessant labors, congratulating herself that this unexpected interruption of her studies had at least saved her from reciting to Queen Bess one of the lessons that she disliked the most.

Miss Benson, after school, tried her hand at softening this refractory pupil, but without success, since her admonitions were entirely of the

dryly moral and didactic Edgeworthian sort, devoid of those appeals to the feelings and imagination wherein the Hungarian took delight. The pair of baffled teachers finally decreed that, as Verena would not say she was sorry, she must be treated to solitary confinement until, as Miss Benson expressed it, "her spirit should be broken," a thing in Verena's case far easier said than done. The hot July noontide therefore found her a prisoner in one of the small bedrooms at the top of the house belonging to an absent elder pupil. Miss Almira, who conducted her thither, undaunted by her previous failure, kept uttering good counsels which, as before, received no answer, and left her provided with spiritual provender in the shape of the complete series of religious allegories by the Rev. Mr. Monro, which she hoped might bring her into a better frame of mind.

Her dinner was sent up to her, and, what with reading the wild but beautifully written and poetic allegories, and dreaming yet wilder visions of her own, she managed to get through the long afternoon pretty comfortably. It was not until the sunset light began to shine into her high lonely room that she first realized her captivity, as the merry voices of the girls rose on the breeze from the garden. It might have comforted her, as she sat looking out on the

waving tree tops, could she have known that at this very time Rose Gordon, whom she mentally accused of forgetting her, was engaged in a remote nook in conspiring with two other daring comrades as to the best mode of conveying aid and consolation to the prisoner in case they should not be able to set her at liberty.

Sophie Howard stood there with Rose, and a certain madcap of thirteen, whose proper appellation of Sophie Wagner was usually exchanged for the less dignified title of "The Little Bear," as her full name was Ursula Sophia (and Ursula, as we all know, signifies "a little she-bear"), which the young lady, who doted on quadrupeds, enjoyed as exceedingly appropriate. Sophie Ursula, as the Little Bear was called by nearly all in order to distinguish her from another Sophie Wagner, a staid elder girl now absent, was one of those clever scapegraces in the class below Kate's, who, though as yet unmentioned in these pages save in connection with her rôle of the Marsh King, had long been one of that young lady's fellow-Thistles and firm allies. The "Little Bear" was an impulsive, sanguine, gray-eyed blonde, by no means lacking in brains, though out of school hours often appearing to delight in displaying as much foolishness as possible. At present she was seated in what she called the typical Yankee attitude, on the bough of a small quince

tree, her red-stockinged legs dangling, her bright auburn hair blown by the wind round her face, while she busily whittled a stick with her penknife and listened to the imaginative Rose, who kept suggesting all sorts of wild plans for Verena's release.

"No, indeed!" began Rose, addressing Sophie Howard, who was perched upon another branch, opposite to the Bear. "You're always laughing and poking fun instead of trying to make Bess feel ashamed of herself. We all ought to stir ourselves and march into the room before prayers, and one of us make a speech to Miss Benson about its being so mean of that hateful thing to have doubted Verena's word."

"Nonsense!" said Sophie Howard carelessly. "You're always so head-over-heels, Rose! Can't you see that it's better just to let their majesties cool down overnight, and keep quiet, and Verena will soon be let out."

"You're only a child, Rose," put in Sophie Ursula, with a merry twinkle in her eyes. "You're all enthusiasm; you haven't learned yet the advantages of playing the martyr as our beloved Elisabeth has been doing all day, going about with an ineffable countenance and a big black patch over that poor little scratch on her hand. If we stir ourselves and make a fuss, as you are so crazy to do, we'll only make

things ten times worse for Verena and ourselves. You know well enough that we can't any of us afford to get into fresh scrapes just now. You got into trouble by putting on a pair of roller skates and skating all along the school-room before Miss Benson came in to open school; and Sophie and I were made examples of for forgetting our dignity so far as to begin squeaking and twanging a jew's-harp under our desk-lids just as the Dragon marched in. We can't afford to run any more risks, I tell you."

"No," exclaimed the other Sophie sturdily. "The Bear always shows that 'Sophia' means 'wisdom,' even in the middle of her tricks; and I mean to remember it, too, and practice prudence for a variety."

"That was all fun; but this is a case of friendship," Rose replied quickly, provoked at the nonchalance of the other two.

"You're a born enthusiast, Rose," retorted the philosopher of thirteen, "and I'll just take the liberty of adding that therefore you'll all your life be getting into hot water by doing all sorts of ridiculous things for persons who wouldn't take half the same trouble for you. Verena doesn't really care anything about you, or anybody except Kate and Fanny Fox; she just likes to run about with you and stir up a fuss because the acting is over, and the girls

gone, and things are dull, and she loves to be wondered at, and admired, and talked about."

"I don't care," Rose rejoined angrily, "you two are always ready to rush into anything if it only promises fun; you don't stop then to consider. Only when it's something for some one else, when it concerns risking your own precious skins, then you're prudence and virtue itself."

"Rose, you're too smart by half in some things; what a pity you've so little common sense in others!" the Little Bear responded, laughing, as she flung away the stick she had been whittling, shut her knife and slid from her perch, followed by the other Sophie, while Rose looked sadly on.

"Going, are you, and not a thing settled?" protested the would-be conspirator, whose generosity was as much in excess of her prudence as the prudence of the Bear appeared to be in advance of her generosity. "Well, then I'll have to 'stand alone,' as Miss Clive says we all have to learn how to do," which last sentence, being intended to be very sublime, had, of course, the effect of setting off her companions into peals of laughter as they scampered away; while poor Rose, who just now admired Verena with all the fervor with which a little girl often adores one somewhat older and more talented than herself, stood leaning over the

low fence that separated the garden from an enclosure where some linen was hung out to dry.

Full of foolish schemes for instantly rescuing her friend from an unjust imprisonment, Rose thought, as her eye fell upon some stout new hempen cords stretched across the yard, that, if she could only manage to smuggle one of those ropes to Verena, the Hungarian might fasten it to the window sill and slide down, as she had often done in the gymnasium, reach the ground, and, joining her friends, march boldly into the parlor when they should be assembled for prayers, in order to confront her persecutors and demand justice. Wherefore, having settled things in her own mind, Rose walked back to the house, fully esteeming herself a heroine, and utterly refusing to answer Queen Bess when the latter met and spoke to her.

Tea was over, and it was nearly dark when Rose, contriving, not without some difficulty, to escape from the two Sophias, who seemed bent on teasing her, ran off alone to the unfrequented end of the garden, and, climbing the fence, cut down with her penknife some fifty feet of brand-new clothes-line with nervous eagerness. Hastily rolling it into a great coil under her arm, the young rebel sped back and stole, as a conspirator should, by back doors and stairs up to her friend's locked place of

captivity. Dragging a chair from a neighboring room, Rose breathlessly mounted and stood on tiptoe, trying to peep through the ventilator, but in vain.

“Is that you, Anne?” asked Verena drowsily, fancying that the maid who had brought up her tea had again tapped at the door. “I’m very comfortable; I’ve gone to bed, and I don’t want anything more.”

“Verena, dear, it’s *I*,” began Rose, slightly taken aback by the prisoner’s assertion of perfect comfort. “It’s Rose—the only one who’s ready to do anything to help you,” she added in a tragic whisper, switching one end of the long trail of rope through the ventilator as she spoke.

“Goodness, Rose, what’s that for?” asked Verena from her bed, as the hard hempen cord came rattling down on the floor.

“It’s a rope—for you to get out of prison with,” drearily whispered Rose, feeling immeasurably aggrieved by the necessity of an explanation. “Don’t you see?—you can tie one end to the window, and slide down, and”—Rose stopped short as a half-stifled laugh arose from within.

“A rope! For me to escape with! I didn’t think any girl on this continent could be so romantic!” exclaimed Verena. “Do you think I’m a heroine in an opera, and have you a fine

fairy prince on a milk-white steed waiting to carry me off to some Paradise where school-teachers can't penetrate? And you've gone and cut that fine new clothes-line that the Dragon bought only last week. You'll catch it if she finds you out," were all poor Rose's thanks.

"I only wanted to help you, Verena," she answered, hardly able to restrain her tears. "I thought, of course, that you'd be forlorn, and dismal, and glad of a chance to get out, and confront them all, and"——

"Yes; but though I can climb like a cat, I prefer not to risk any of my nine lives by sliding down a thin clothes-line out of a third-story window in the dark," returned the captive, with provoking cheerfulness. "You're a dear little soul, Rose, but it's no use. I'm very comfortable here, and they can't keep me in jail forever. Don't fret any more about me, but run down and try to put that precious clothes-line where you found it. Good night!"

"Good night. You won't ask pardon of Elisabeth?" moaned poor Rose as a sort of last resource, slowly gathering up the rope as Verena got up and flung its end out over the door.

"No, no; I'll never abase myself to *her*," was the only crumb of comfort Rose could gather as she dolefully put back the chair whereon she had been standing and slowly slunk away. She

felt crushed, wounded and mortified to a degree that would have aroused Verena's sympathies had she been at all aware of it. Sounds of cheerful voices came from the parlor; Rose fancied she heard herself called, and nervously hastened along the dim, unlighted corridor. Her eyes were so blinded with tears that she did not see how one coil of the rope was hanging in a long loop close to her feet. She wanted to reach the yard to replace it, and began to run downstairs rapidly. Just as she passed the landing of the second floor her feet became entangled; she plunged wildly forward and rolled down nearly the whole of the lower flight until she lay, quite stunned, within a few feet of Miss Almira's little room. Almira's first thought was that the Hungarian had broken loose, and her cry of terror and surprise at finding poor Rose lying unconscious, her feet entangled in the meshes of a long rope, which she soon recognized as the new clothes-line, brought a crowd of scholars and servants to the spot.

CHAPTER XVI.

VERENA'S VAGARIES.

WHEN Rose opened her eyes she was lying upon Miss Almira's sofa; the "Dragon" and Miss Benson were rubbing her limbs and forehead, while the maids disentangled the rope and a mass of girlish heads peeped in at the door. She was not seriously hurt, but bruised and sore, scarcely able to speak. She lay still and heard her teachers' wondering comments and saw Sophie Howard's merry face grow grave with anxiety, and beheld Sophie Ursula shake her thick mane of auburn locks and dart forward, exclaiming, with a half-stifled laugh, "Don't blame her, poor child—you don't know, Miss Benson, what a heroine we have here to-night!"

Rose, apparently half-unconscious, felt immeasurably revived by these words; but her satisfaction greatly diminished, and she found it convenient to lie motionless and silent while the provoking "Little Bear" proceeded to inform the company of Rose's desperate determination to help Verena to escape. "And she oughtn't to be scolded, for she has only tried to

carry out some of the lessons about altruism, and heroism, and self-sacrifice which Miss Clive is forever talking about," went on this young rogue of a Thistle, with a most exemplary gravity that nearly upset the other girls. "Sophie Howard and I protested, but it was no use."

"Then she's better than any of you, poor little dear!" Almira exclaimed with an enthusiasm that encouraged Rose to languidly raise her eyelids and beg that Verena might be released at once.

"She's not worth thinking about until you have been attended to, dear," was Miss Benson's evasive answer; and Rose, secretly much consoled for her unsuccessful expedition and her tumble by being made a heroine, was helped upstairs, and put to bed. She was so bruised and aching the next morning that her teachers judged it prudent to keep her in the dormitory, and Verena, hearing from Miss Almira how the child had got into trouble for her sake, rewarded that lady's final appeal to her conscience by uttering a sort of indefinite admission of regret for her conduct, though she stiffly refused to make Elisabeth any apology.

Her guardians were weary of lecturing her; so, being, as it were, released upon parole, she kept comparatively quiet for some time, feeling extremely dull, though she was not unhappy

and certainly never wished herself at home again. She tried Sophie Ursula for a companion, but soon found that the Little Bear was a very determined young lady, quite averse to letting anyone take the lead, as Verena liked to do. Sophie was uncommonly shrewd, not at all sentimental, and saw through or laughed at Verena's occasional self-betrayal into flights of wild fancy in a way which secretly provoked the Hungarian almost beyond endurance. The school library was pretty soon exhausted by this precocious Thistle, who devoured every fairy tale, read through many works by Miss Yonge and Miss Sewell with great interest and incredible rapidity, tried a celebrated American juvenile, but soon flung it down; and finally plunged deep into a large edition of Mrs. Hemans' Poems, one of Miss Clive's favorite *pièces de résistance* for poetry lovers among the younger girls, whom she wisely deemed too young to be allowed to rove at will among the pathless wilds of Robert Browning, to whom "Aurora Leigh" was still forbidden fruit, and who only were, as yet, permitted to enter the magic realms of Shakespeare, Tennyson, Byron and Elizabeth Barrett Browning for an occasional brief tour, under her own especial escort. These prohibitions, however, did not avail much in Verena's case, as she had already, at home, wandered far and wide among a host of books, often

betraying an intimate acquaintance with many works of poetry and romance which startled her teachers, amused herself, and called forth anew the whispers about "Elsie Venner" among the girls.

Rose, still hanging round Verena, one day lighted upon her German copy of "Sintram and His Companions," and, puzzling over the title, mistook "Gefährten" (companions) for "Gefahren" (dangers), gravely insisting that "Sintram and His Dangers" made excellent sense; while the Little Bear raised a laugh by saying that it certainly made sense, for that anyone, especially Rose, might see that companions was often synonymous with dangers at school. Verena herself seemed fated to get into trouble even when alone. Like Kate, she often felt an absolute need for solitude, and would hide away from the others behind the cedars, or, taking a book, would climb up to the top of a strong wooden trellis covered by a thick grape vine, and revel in the airy quiet of her perch among the clustering leaves. Descending one afternoon from her unsuspected retreat, she had hardly begun to return towards the house, her head still full of a wild medley of poetry and romance, before she was startled by the sight of Elisabeth Armstrong's grave and disapproving face as she drew near.

“Verena Forster,” she began, in her abrupt hard tone that always roused in the girls a spirit of opposition. “I was looking for you. I came to tell you that I have received a letter from Kate—here it is, if you wish to read it. I wish to tell you, also, that Mrs. Leslie writes to me that Kate is behaving remarkably well, thanks to her being removed from bad company, and that I hope you will have sense enough, when she returns, to avoid trying to lead her into any of your own silly, childish, unpardonable tricks.”

Verena, thus dashed down suddenly from her beloved region of fancy, her heart sore with the contrast between her ideal world and the hard realities of school, felt very angry and curtly replied, “Keep the letter for yourself. She has written more to me than to you, and”——

“You are a bad girl, Verena Forster,” Elisabeth went on, standing in front of her intended victim, and growing more indignant every moment; while the Hungarian, though irritated, felt also rather amused at this awkward attempt at a scolding on the part of a fellow-pupil. “You are utterly wild and insubordinate. You cannot be rebuked without beginning to defend yourself, instead of being gentle, and humble, and”——

“Gentle and humble, indeed!” cried Verena, with flashing eyes. “Much gentleness and

humility we see in you! You're just the most stuck-up, unpopular, insufferable prig in school. You're absorbed in your books and affect to despise us, when all the time we're laughing at you."

"Speak for yourself," said Elisabeth, haughtily. "Whatever your own silly set may say is of no consequence; and a half-crazy girl like you"——

"I'd rather have my madness than your sense!" cried Verena, almost transported with fury as she glared up into her tall antagonist's face. It was only by the most violent effort and by vividly picturing to herself the consequences, that she was able to refrain from striking her; as it was, she confronted Elisabeth, quivering in every limb, while the latter went on:

"It is not for myself that I care at all; but you have always set Kate a very bad example, and you very well know it."

"And you know very well that it's not love for Kate, but only your own atrocious pride that makes you care," Verena screamed in turn. "You are a by-word in school for not loving her! You snub her, and scold her, and try to cheapen whatever she does that she gets praised for, and you pretend it's sisterly interest when we all see that it's part of your own abominable pride and self-conceit, because you can't bear

that anyone who is related to you shouldn't be as prim, and priggish, and hateful as yourself. Don't begin now with any humbug. We all saw how jealous you were when Kate got up her play, because you couldn't have done it yourself. You kept sneering, and criticising, and would have liked to put it down—but you couldn't; and you can't keep Kate down, either; she's worth a dozen such prigs as you, and everybody knows she has far more in her than you have, even though you get high marks for knowing your lessons—and you can't frighten me with your airs, I can tell you."

"If I can't frighten you, somebody else can!" cried Elisabeth, in a rage, for the Hungarian had uttered most unpleasant truth. "You had better look out. Your character here is not quite high enough for you to indulge in such talk; and some day you'll find it out. Oh, you needn't stamp, and clench your fists, and get up high tragedy—here, among your miserable, sentimental books that you read, and get Kate to read, instead of something useful, which would cultivate your minds. You're not what a girl of your age ought to be, as Miss Clive told Kate that day when you were all caught in such a silly scrape—a girl old enough to be confirmed—a fine pair of candidates you and she would make just now! You care only for childish things. When I was your age"—

“When you were my age, of course you were everything prim, and proper, and detestable. I’ll own your superiority in the way of boasting!” yelled Verena, clutching at the bars of the trellis from which she had recently descended in order to prevent herself from flinging one of the “miserable, sentimental books” at Elisabeth’s head. Half beside herself as she was, there yet seemed something irresistibly ludicrous in the thought of using either “Sintram,” or Mrs. Hemans’ Poems, or “The Sandhills of Jutland” for such a purpose; and she burst into a hysterical laugh.

“When I was your age, I lived in peace and harmony with my teachers, and never tried to make trouble,” Elisabeth rejoined, truthfully enough, but with her lofty air; whereat the Hungarian exclaimed, “Then you have altered, for you don’t seem to care much about not making trouble now! Go, and tell them every word I said; do, for it was you who began it. Go!” And, hugging her books still tighter, Verena cut short the quarrel by running away, indulging in a peal of mocking laughter which, as soon as she reached the house, out of sight of her enemy, gave place to a flood of bitter tears. Elisabeth walked slowly on, exceedingly angry at the wild Magyar’s home thrusts, which had pierced even her armor of self-esteem, but quite confident in her own superiority, and

fancying that her unprovoked attack had been the fulfilment of a pressing duty.

The warm evening was spent out of doors. Miss Benson, missing girl after girl from the group on the porch (where she was trying to "direct the conversation" in a ponderous and instructive manner), went in search, and came upon an eager audience on the seats under the trees. Verena, erect and graceful, stood on the swing, reciting a condensed but most vivid and dramatic version of the story of Sintram, in very fluent and poetic English, to Rose and another child crouching at her feet, as she slowly rocked to and fro in accompaniment, often venting her emotion at the more stirring parts by "working up" until she nearly touched the boughs, while the moonlight, streaming between the tops of the cedars, fell upon her dark hair and pale, enthusiastic face. Miss Benson, making sure that there was nothing worth interfering with, returned to the porch, quite indifferent to the wild story which captivated the girls, and wondering, as she caught a glimpse of poor Almira, half-hidden by a spreading tree, listening and sometimes drying her eyes, how on earth a middle-aged person could care to waste time upon such things. She was too devoid herself of imagination to comprehend how the hard-worked under-teacher, from amid her grim round of duties, looked at

the foreign pupil as somehow the embodiment of a far-off beauty which Almira had all her life been vaguely longing for and never realized, filled, as she was at heart, with a hidden vein of ideality that had been sorely crushed by her surroundings and by the chill influences of her girlhood in her Puritan New England home.

It was a relief to all when Madame Verrier returned and received from "Queen Bess," about to leave for a brief tour with her uncle, a voluntary resignation of the authority she had so unskillfully tried to wield. A few of the pupils whose homes were at a distance, and who made short excursions with friends for their vacation, now began to appear at Mount Cedar; but things still remained rather too quiet to suit Verena, who, like Kate, was never so well or so happy as when she was in excited pursuit of something. Nobody seemed disposed for any more acting, and even a suggestion that they should get up an impromptu masquerade fell unheeded; so that the Hungarian one rainy evening contrived to create a commotion and to bring herself and Sophie Howard into hot water by the hackneyed mischief of pretending to raise a ghost. Caught by Miss Benson and the Dragon in the lumber garret, where they had produced a sensation resulting in too many squeals of tragic-comic terror from

an excited audience, the would-be ghost (Sophie, draped in a sheet in which she had risen from an empty barrel, in spectral majesty) and necromancer (Verena, arrayed as a wizard, with robe, wand from the gymnasium and other appropriate belongings, but discovered ignominiously cowering inside one of the empty barrels rolled on its side when the teachers entered; while the spectators dived down behind boxes wherever they could find a refuge, soon betrayed by their very audible giggling), after a lecture upon "childishness and folly" from Miss Benson, were sentenced to exclusion from a picnic which Madame had promised them for the next day.

Sophie grumbled, but submitted pretty quietly. Verena secretly enjoyed the unwonted peace and stillness of the house after the others were gone, with only Miss Almira left in charge. The Dragon kept up rather a sharp lookout upon the culprits during the long morning, but their virtuous meekness gradually led her to relax her vigilance, and by the middle of the hot, languid afternoon the drowsy air had lulled her into a profound slumber in an arm-chair in the parlor. Sophie was already nodding over some book; and Verena, thankful to have her quiet, sat devouring "The Marsh King's Daughter," growing so excited over it that she could not keep still any longer. No

orders had been given for staying indoors, and she noiselessly slipped out into the garden. It was towards sunset; the sky had become overcast; all the trees stood motionless.

Verena ran as far from the house as possible, rejoicing in being for once all alone, able to rove, sing, recite poetry to herself, fling her arms in ecstasy round the prickly boughs of the fir trees, and give vent to her poetic fancies without a crowd of girls looking on and wondering. The Hungarian, it must be owned, sometimes irritated her schoolmates by refusing to join in some of their pastimes, which appeared to her both poor and dull and meaningless compared with the absorbing visions of her brain, pardonably if somewhat proudly conscious that it was her own superior sensitiveness to everything beautiful and poetic which prevented her from being able to immerse herself in other persons' interests and take pleasure in every common thing. Verena's individuality was too strong for her to suppress it without a struggle which destroyed all happiness. It always mattered to her what she did; she could not yield her own wishes without acute, if hidden, suffering; while many of the other girls gained credit for being "so amiable" because they hardly had any very pronounced tastes, and rather liked to follow the lead of somebody, like little Brownie, now

returned to school. She had no imagination, whereas Verena delighted to dream and to fancy herself one of the personages in any story she had been reading, and, still thinking of Helga, the viking's wild adopted daughter, climbed up a trellis and made a wreath of vine leaves for her dark locks, singing and wandering on.

The low leaden thunder clouds had settled down across the west till only a bar of pale, clear sky shone out beneath, with a strange gleaming light. Long heavy folds of dark vapor hung along the south; the trees and fields wore a ghastly hue of yellow-green below the lurid sky, against which every bush and flower and blade of grass on the hilltop stood out with unnatural distinctness. Verena exulted in the gloom, and hush, and expectancy all around. Her own hot, throbbing life seemed to draw in a sense of fullness and expression from this silent brooding nature waiting for the storm. She could not put it into words, but there was something in this wild evening light, in the grayness and stillness that almost intoxicated her with a sense of weird enjoyment, which she thought not one of her schoolmates except Kate Armstrong could have understood, and which would have made all her teachers, save Frau Schulze (whose absence during the vacation made her feel alone among strangers), deem

her almost mad if they had seen her running along the hilltop, with streaming, leaf-crowned hair, waving her arms towards the threatening sky, and singing snatches of Hungarian songs to music of her own.

One glimpse from a window at the darkening landscape would have sufficed to kindle her strange ecstasy; but here, alone on the free hilltop, where the long grass was bending in the rising wind and the pine trees rustled, every moment fed her sense of joy and wonder. She could not stand still, could not go back to the house; and, scarcely pausing to consider, ran down past the kitchen garden, quite "out of bounds," till she, swiftly hastening on over a few meadows, past some scattered dwellings, gained the bank of the river and looked out along the dull gray water reflecting the dark sky.

The storm seemed to be going round in another direction, but a strong breeze was blowing from the west. Between her and the half-bright sunset rose an arched bridge; three figures stood out upon it against the low streak of light. One was a lady, the second a grave-looking, tall, slight girl of fifteen, and the third a girl of about the size of Sophie Ursula, and not unlike her in general appearance as she leaned upon the stone parapet, her thick auburn hair waving in the wind, and her bright purple dress shining

in that yellow gleam from the horizon. Her hat, lying on the stonework, was newly adorned with a huge bunch of purple Scotch thistles, while another fresh bunch was in her hand. Without being pretty, she attracted Verena, and she lingered on the bank, glancing up at her face, feeling what romantic persons call a drawing towards her, wishing that she would speak.

A sound of merry voices came from eastward. Verena started as a large boat, rowed by Sandy and two other men, floated into sight.

A bright flag fluttered from its stern, around which were seated Madame Verrier, Miss Benson and their group of pupils, uniting in a song that every few moments seemed to break down for want of some one to supply the singers' scanty knowledge of the words.

Verena, however, knew it. Glad of the opportunity for a surprise, she slipped behind the bushes, and, at the next failure, astonished the whole boatload, now just opposite to her hiding-place, by breaking out with the right verse, in her rich voice. Madame started and exclaimed, thinking it an echo, while Sophie Ursula, who had recognized the singer, declared it must, in that case, be similar to the famous echo which the Irishman boasted would return to "How are you?" a "Very well, I thank you."

Brownie, inconveniently candid, as usual, persisted that she knew it was Verena's voice, and

Madame, quite excited, ordered Sandy to stop the boat. Further discussion was prevented by the Hungarian suddenly appearing from behind the bushes as if stepping forth upon the stage, her crown of vine leaves on her hair, singing the remainder of the song; while the girls kept silent that they might enjoy the notes of a voice which, in its strength and pathos, with a wild thrill of sadness suddenly breaking through its passion, so far excelled any of their own.

“Mais, ma chere petite, que faites-vous ici-bas?” cried Madame in dismay, quite at a loss what to do. Leaving Verena to go home alone was out of the question, while the most natural plan of taking her into the boat was rendered difficult by the want of a proper landing-place upon that bank; and the puzzled teachers began to hold a council.

Verena, of course enjoying the sensation, contrived to prolong it by various acts of *diablerie*, threatening to jump into the water and swim out to the boat, which everyone knew she was perfectly able to do, in case they would not take her in by coming as near as possible to the high bank, whence she might leap among them. During this discussion she was agreeably conscious of the eager and sympathetic eyes of the girl in the purple dress, who seemed to be a sort of silent friend and ally, sure to be

congenial both to herself and Kate, and whose half-heard comments upon the scene, caught at intervals amid the noise of tongues, and poor, worried Madame's ejaculations, seemed in keeping with her interesting face. The elder girl and the lady looked on with an expression of surprise mingled with disapprobation; but the younger one, when the boat finally drew as near as was practicable, leaned over so far that her hat, thistles and all, fell upon the lap of Sophie Ursula, who, looking up, said afterwards that she was almost startled at seeing a girl so like herself bending down a laughing face, apparently delighted when the Little Bear, rising, waved the hat aloft, inquiring what to do.

"Throw it over to me and I'll run up with it," put in Verena, glad of an opportunity for speaking to the stranger; and Sandy, stretching his arms as far as possible, did manage to get the hat over to where Verena stood. Eagerly seizing it, she rushed up to the bridge, meeting her new friend half-way, and exclaiming, "May I keep a thistle?"

"The whole bunch if you like," said the girl, with a cheery smile. "How stupid of me to drop thistles almost on persons' heads, and"——

"Margaret!" broke in the lady from above, "you are very much indebted to the young lady; and you should have kept your hat on your head."

The chilling tone seemed to vex the girl; but she spoke a few words of thanks, and walked down, hat in hand, to the spot whence Verena, holding the desired thistles, was lifted by the strong-armed Sandy into the boat, somewhat to her regret, as she would have preferred leaping in and shocking the lady up yonder, with her stiff, disapproving daughter.

Margaret stood wistfully looking after the merry girls as the boat pushed out into the stream and shot swiftly along. Verena and the Little Bear looked back at her till out of sight, then exchanged slight, expressive nods. Madame deferred a rebuke until she should reach home (her wrath, indeed, was purely for form's sake on this especial occasion, since the culprit had her secret sympathy), and Verena keenly enjoyed the sail along the river in the twilight. It was worth while, even if she were to be scolded. The low, yellow bar of cold, sad light still shone out from underneath the canopy of heavy cloud; a cool breeze blew across the dark gray water. The river wound between high, elder-covered banks and sloping meadows; each sudden turn showed some new glimpse of darkling landscape or dusky trees against the sky that stirred the Hungarian girl's artist-nature to its core and made her feel impatient at the indifference of her companions, their commonplace talk about the smaller incidents

of their day in the woods, the games they had played, their dinner on the grass. Oh, that she had words or colors to express the sombre beauty all around, that fairly weighed upon her with its mystery and fullness!

CHAPTER XVII.

OUR NEW SCOTCH THISTLE.

EARLY August found Kate Armstrong speeding by rail back to school, divided between regret at parting from her kind English friends and relief at having her long visit over and being able to return to the girls, and the stir, and the frisky freedom she so dearly loved. And thus her parting tears, though plenteous and sincere, were dried in time for her to enjoy a final glimpse of the splendid panorama of Quebec upon its citadel-crowned height; and when they had crossed the river and were dashing through the wild Canadian pine forests, she felt her heart expand and thrill with a new, delicious sense of secret happiness.

Her traveling companion was a gentle, quiet elderly lady, who did not expect her to talk much, but left her to revel in peace in her own strange, dreamy enjoyment. The whole long journey was a romantic idyl to Kate, who had traveled that way before, but never, as now, in the very heart of summer bloom and richness. She loved to sit for hours silently looking out at

the landscape incessantly shifting before her far-sighted eyes that took in the whole sweep of the country to the horizon. The noise and motion of the train seemed to stimulate her fancy; she often looked back to wild snatches of song and fragments of fiction as having first occurred to her while she was being whirled along past fields of Indian corn in its full splendor of silken tassels and glistening leaves, or as they dashed across some viaduct, with the low landscape sloping away on either side, and far-off glimpses of hills and trees against the line of sky. It was nearly sunset when she arrived at the end of her journey, rejoicing to catch sight of the school omnibus drawn up near the station, where she found Miss Clive and several girls prepared to await a train which was to bring back three or four pupils from an opposite direction. Kate flung down her bag and rushed into Verena's arms with as much gladness as if she were beginning a holiday visit instead of ending one. She fairly wrung old Jake's black horny hand, and but for the "General's" presence would have bestowed abundant caresses upon his especial darlings, the pair of fine gray mules that drew the omnibus. It did not surprise her, as Miss Clive went to speak to the station master, to see the Little Bear quietly slipping up to her long-eared friends for a sly patting of their sleek

necks, while Kate herself was simultaneously pounced upon by several Thistles, including Fanny, who had returned from her trip a day or two before.

The Bear must have fancied Miss Clive was about to rebuke her, Kate thought, for she reappeared among them with marvelous suddenness, giving her a sort of stage hug over one shoulder; while the others burst into apparently unaccountable peals of laughter, renewed as, to Kate's utter bewilderment, the next moment Sophie Ursula, or her wraith, appeared from the direction of the omnibus.

"Sophie! Are you a *Doppelgänger*?" cried Kate, mystified; while the merriment redoubled and the girl whom she had believed to be the Little Bear released her and stepped back to where she could gaze at both.

"We told her to puzzle you," laughed Verena. "I knew you would be taken in. And I am deposed from my position as the new girl. This is the latest addition to our school, and our class—our new Scotch Thistle, Miss Margaret Gordon, who was so eager to be transplanted into such congenial soil that she couldn't wait for the holidays to be over."

Miss Clive's reappearance caused the conversation to become somewhat less jocular; but the main facts were as follows: The new Thistle was the girl whose hat had dropped from the

bridge into Sophie Ursula's lap, while the Scotch blood was but a matter of descent. Her grandmother, an old lady living not far from C——, had recently fallen into such ill-health that Margaret's mother had gone to take care of her, and, finding that her only daughter required more supervision than she now could give, and pined for companionship, had agreed to the girl's own suggestion that she should go to Mount Cedar on trial for the remainder of the holidays, with the prospect of staying if the school appeared to suit her. The new home at her grandmother's seemed dreary, spite of the pleasant house and lovely garden; her father and brother had gone on a trip to California, and Margaret felt wildly exhilarated by her sudden plunge into an atmosphere of merry girlhood after the rather heavy visit she had just made to some cousins in the neighborhood, where her companion, the grave-looking young lady whom Verena had seen upon the bridge, had proved far too staid and mature for the frisky guest, only one year her junior. The main thing that captivated the Thistles was the newcomer's strong general resemblance to Sophie Ursula, so that they looked like sisters. Margaret, although just the age of Verena and Kate, was of the size of the Little Bear, with the same blonde, reddish coloring and gray eyes, though the Bear had somewhat the

advantage as regarded features, and was destined to grow up the prettier of the two. In their school uniforms this resemblance reached its climax, and the jubilant Bear, as soon as they reached home, brimmed over to Kate with absurd anticipations of the jokes and amusing blunders likely to arise from her having, as she said, found her wished-for twin at last.

“We’ll get scolded for each other’s faults and make a grand fuss showing off our magnanimity by bearing blame for each other, like those high-flown good girls in the old-fashioned books. And, oh, Kate, she has spent two or three years in Europe, and had been all over Italy, and can tell us even more than Verena, and is just crazy about acting—she was asked to your play; it seems that Helen Palmer is some sort of far-off cousin, and begged Mrs. Hill to invite Margaret—and she says she longed to be upon the stage among us, and hopes you’ll persuade them to repeat the *Kloster im Walde* so as to give her a part. Oh, you may well feel jolly; you are back just in time! Mrs. Hill’s birthday will come soon, and the ‘General’ means to get up a festival, with costumes, and national dances, and rhymes spoken by a train of Flower Spirits, and charming fun.”

Kate broke in with a torrent of questions, to the relief of Fanny and Verena, who had

secretly felt some anxiety lest she should return in rather too grave and sedate a mood after the unwonted strain of several weeks among older persons. Fanny, indeed, had slyly prophesied that what she irreverently chose to term Mrs. Leslie's attempts at "coming the godmother" over Kate might result in her much-tried teachers being able to gather a few figs from her thistle for a while, and almost expected to see her calmed down and perhaps wishing herself back among the Leslies once more. It is true that she felt an occasional longing after the motherly kindness and tender individual care she had left behind; but there was a wild relief in being again able to vent her fancies with Verena, pet the animals with Sophie Ursula, cultivate the promising "Scotch Thistle," whom she found decidedly congenial, and exchange her visiting character for the much less troublesome rôle she supported at Mount Cedar of a madcap Thistle, odd, talented, and unlike the other girls.

"Kate, tell us one thing," began Fanny when they ran out into the garden after tea. "We're just crazy to know whether you and that good-looking Leslie boy kept up that charming flirtation you began."

"No," said Kate sturdily, but flushed, and conscious that several pairs of piercing eyes were fixed upon her. "He was only there a day or two; he went off with his brother for

a trip somewhere; so I was spared the horrid bother of having to make talk to them.”

So the threatened raillery was averted, and Kate resumed joyful possession of her alcove, which her friends had appropriately decorated with purple thistles and other wild-growing things she dearly loved. It may be added that they had long since quietly adopted and inscribed inside their desk-lids the Scotch motto, “*Nemo me impune lacessit*,” to remind the public that nobody injured *them* with impunity. And the next morning came the pleasure of regaining her own desk, with its fanciful appendages hidden here and there, and copious store of well-used and well-bitten lead pencils, each one privately named after some pet gnome, goblin or kobold among its owner’s large stock of elfin acquaintances, according to what Kate insisted was the peculiar and individual expression of its crooked, blunted or clean-sharpened point.

August suns, as “Foxey” observed, seemed to have ripened the luxuriant Thistles of Mount Cedar into their fullest purple bloom and prickliness, so that it hardly surprised them, at first, to find Kate slightly less headstrong than usual and, under the influence of Mrs. Leslie’s teaching, drawing back from a few of their frolics. Valiantly, though with some regret,

resisting the temptation of joining sundry mad-caps in a raid upon the apple orchard, she betook herself one afternoon to her nook among the asparagus bushes, with her godmother's parting gift, a book, carried hidden under the broad hat swung from her arm, eager to escape unseen.

Kate had already finished half of "Tom Brown's Schooldays," and was now absorbed in the history of his friendship with Arthur, the interest, of course, being greatly enhanced by comparisons she could not help drawing between the Rugby boys' adventures and those of the Thistles; wishing, moreover, that a little of Dr. Arnold's spirit could animate the Mount Cedar authorities. There was no one to whom she felt that she could go for counsel in any crisis of her inner life, as Harry East was described as going to Dr. Arnold—how she envied him for thus being able to seek his master in order to pour out his heart.

"Crying—or very near it? Naughty child, have you a novel?" began "Foxey," as, with several others, she suddenly invaded the hiding-place of Kate, who instantly clasped the book in her arms so as to hide its title from their inquisitive eyes.

"She has a good book, of course," laughed Verena, with a secret pang of conscience. "Perhaps it's a Bible—oh!"

“Verena, it is *not* a Bible!” screamed Kate, with crimson cheeks, as though accused of a quite unbearable amount of goodness.

“Well, Goosey, and what harm would it be if it were?” asked Fanny, much amused. “Oh, you needn’t clutch it so tightly; we know well enough that Bibles aren’t bound in green; and if you won’t tell us what it is, I’ll guess it’s a novel not in our library, and that our sins in going after these apples are as nothing compared with yours in seeking after another kind of forbidden fruit.”

Thus teased, Kate yielded up her book, which Fanny, after sundry characteristic observations, pronounced to be the very thing for what they called “reading in council.” “And who knows but that it may help to convert your old friends just a little, as it seems to be doing with you.”

“I’m willing,” cried Kate, relieved and rather glad to make the book known among the girls. “Only don’t make me responsible for the preaching parts, mind!” Fanny promised, but the readings held by a set of merry Thistles did not come off, day after day, without a sufficient share of giddy mirth and thoughtless banter that often made Kate wince under Fanny’s very undisguised parallels between Dr. Arnold’s pupils and those of Miss Clive, which opened a fine field for sly sarcasm and school-girl wit.

“Kate takes it too seriously, as she does everything she cares for,” answered “Foxey” in private to Verena’s slight protest against making fun of their friend’s hobbies. “You know I don’t mean any harm; only, as you remember Frau Schulze said not long ago, I seem to have fallen into the position of the critic and *esprit fort* of our class—and you are the talented, interesting young foreigner, whom nobody can put down—and ‘Cornelia Mary Freeman’ is a specimen of what I might call the muscular Christianity of our school, though I’m afraid the muscularity decidedly outweighs the other just now. And Kate—well, perhaps you may have read something about those wonderful Gordons. I mean that Kate, being a descendent of that clan, can never be expected to keep quiet or to do things by halves—and now that she has a new ally in our delightful ‘Scotch Thistle,’ we may be very sure of seeing her burst out into more than her old friskiness before long. Just now, of course, she’s bewitched by Tom Brown—it’s a charming book—and, if Virginia Leslie were here, she would be Kate’s ‘Arthur,’ and Kate herself would enjoy trying to act the reformed Tom, with me, I suppose, for ‘East,’ unless you preferred assuming that character, as conversion is considered desirable in your quarter.”

“If you’ll find somebody like Dr. Arnold to

rule over us, I'll undertake to be 'converted' fast enough," growled the Hungarian, irritated, though amused, by "Foxey's" home thrusts and secretly thankful that Fanny's absence had prevented her from knowing anything about her own haunting fits of compunction when she was reciting "Sintram" or reading allegories.

But Fanny's prophecies, as usual, proved true; for Kate's transient tinge of soberness was speedily banished by the exciting occupation soon assigned to her of composing rhymes (with Margaret as a collaborator) to be spoken by the train of flower spirits who were to bring floral tributes to Mrs. Hill, while Miss Clive, attired as a Spanish señora, was to open the masque by an address in verse to a select invited audience. Poor Dorinda was to support a character, while Madame Verrier, dressed as a marquise, actually persuaded Mrs. Hill for once to undergo a like transformation at her skilful hands. Herr Schulze, only too glad to take part in the frolic, and, like so many of his countrymen, still a boy at heart, appeared in a marvelous old black gown and square velvet cap, dating from his professorial days in the Fatherland, which, with some slight additional ornamentation of his burly form, he declared to have metamorphosed him into no less a personage than Dr. Martin Luther; while the Frau, determined not to be outdone, had impro-

vised what she considered a fitting costume for the staid Katharina von Bora. Word having somehow reached the Professor that sundry Thistles bitterly regretted that they might not carry out the joke further by dressing up one of their number, or, better still, old Jake, to represent the Devil at whom Dr. Luther flung his inkstand, Herr Schulze appeared bearing an ancient and gigantic inkstand, of most outlandish make, which he in solemn rhyme displayed as the genuine article once used in putting the Evil One to flight.

The "Scotch Thistle," meanwhile, had struck up such a close friendship with the Little Bear and with Kate that Fanny (to whom Verena now attached herself more than ever) insisted that the trio ought to be called the "Pearl of Pure Wisdom," because the names, Katharine, Margaret, and Sophia respectively signified purity, a pearl and wisdom; which was hailed with shouts of laughter by the Thistles, including the heroines of the jest, whose present behavior, indeed, might be taken, as Dickens would say, "in a contrairy sense," so far as wisdom was concerned. Much of this was doubtless owing to the fact that Margaret's spirits during her foreign tour had been unduly repressed by a series of German and English governesses, while her amusingly realistic accounts of the previous winter, spent in Rome,

where she herself and some Scotch cousins shared the blessings of a strict Caledonian instructress, served to shatter many of Kate's visions of the delights of a residence abroad. "You would not think it so fine if you never dared to go out one step alone, and were forever being lectured about your tastes, and told not to pet animals—yes, Sophie, you may well groan!—and have your reading limited to just certain heavy books and childish tales, nothing you really cared for."

Little Rose Gordon, who, though not related to Margaret, did not at all belie the reputation of that famous clan for dash and boldness, and was devotedly attached, not only to the Hungarian, but to the "Pearl of Pure Wisdom," soon became their follower in mischief, as will be seen.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ESCAPADE.

“**A** FINE piece of work! Raining pitchforks—and we four ever so far from home, and all wet, and it’s nearly dark, and we can’t possibly get back before the bell rings, and we’re in for a time of it!” growled Kate.

Margaret, Verena and Rose, who would not be left behind, had incited Kate one sultry afternoon to an expedition in pursuit of certain pears and apples belonging to the establishment, which, having dropped from the boughs, they somewhat rashly considered their lawful prey, better employed in ministering to their own eager appetites, then and there, than being left to be picked up by Sandy, to figure as pie or preserves in the uncertain future. (The Little Bear, it must be said, had been debarred from joining them by the sad fact that she was behindhand with her arithmetic, and compelled to spend a great part of the afternoon in doing some sums which, had she been less intent upon nonsense during the morning, might have been finished long before.) Having gathered as

much as their skirts would hold, they deemed it wise to retire to enjoy themselves in safety in a field adjoining the orchard, whence, being already "out of bounds," they quickly departed for a ramble along the highroad until, with some faint remonstrances from little Rose, but great general enjoyment, they reached the outskirts of the town, and proceeded to invest in candy at a small shop much honored by custom from the school.

Fate, however, had punishment in store for the delinquents nearer at hand than Mount Cedar, for, while hastening back with full pockets, guilty consciences and uneasy minds beneath a threatening sky, they were caught by a sudden heavy shower at some distance from any dwelling, and compelled to seek shelter under a tree by the roadside, where a few minutes sufficed to bring the straw hats, linen dresses and leather shoes into a most woeful plight.

"Sit down, Rose, on that big root, and we'll try to stand so as to keep the rain off you," went on Kate, who, to do her justice, felt more concerned for the child than for herself. "No; you're right. We're drenched, and behind time, and in for a scrape now."

"Lucky if we're not in for a siege of sickness after all those apples and this sousing," laughed Verena, almost elated at the prospect

of a scrape in congenial company, instead of a solitary one at home.

"The candy's all wet and gummed together," moaned Rose, feeling in her pocket. "Ten cents' worth in one horrid, sticky mass. Too bad!"

"I couldn't run now to that house over yonder in these dripping clothes, not even if the Dragon were at my heels," put in Margaret. "But I don't want to have my name sent home as figuring in a scrape so soon; and we must manage to wade back before teatime, somehow."

Rose sighed; even Verena grew anxious; Kate, quite desperate, felt ready to insist upon plunging schoolwards through the storm and the fast-gathering darkness; while Margaret stepped forward from beneath the boughs in order to see whether there seemed any prospect of a slackening of the pouring rain. Just as she stood upon the brink of the road, looking in the direction of Mount Cedar, she gave a violent start, and astounded her companions in misfortune by darting back among them as if in terror, while the cause of her excitement became visible in the shape of a large closed carriage, slowly coming round a turn, in the heavy mud. Margaret dashed behind Kate, uttering a half-choked "Oh, dear!" in such tones that Kate anxiously asked what on earth was the matter,

“Matter! It’s Mrs. Livingstone’s carriage—from Maple Grove—she married my mother’s first cousin, you know, and I was spending a few days with them when I saw Verena and the girls in the boat. Matter! I shall be recognized and reported to my parents as being seen ‘out of bounds,’ and—oh, goodness, they’re going to stop; what *shall* we do?”

By this time the carriage was just opposite and had stopped, indeed.

“Margaret,” a clear, cold, rather hard but unmistakably ladylike voice called from the window, “what are you and your friends doing here?”

“We were caught by the rain, Cousin Gertrude,” simply answered Margaret, growing brave, now that she must face the situation in earnest.

“Helen and I are going home,” resumed the lady, “it is too late for us to turn about and drive you back, as I should like to do, I fear.”

“We were just going to walk back,” exclaimed Margaret, wishing that they had set off, so as to avoid this awkward being “taken into custody” by her too solicitous cousin by marriage, who, after a brief parley with her daughter and the coachman, both of whom voted against turning round and going to Mount Cedar, opened the carriage door and bade the girls to get in, adding that she would be glad

to take them to Maple Grove, dry their wet clothes, and send them home in an hour or two. Margaret, in despair, tried to decline the invitation, knowing that her friends in mischief would rather risk the muddy tramp homewards than, as Kate would have said, be taken as prisoners to a strange house and solemnly sent back so late that all possibility of concealment was out of the question. But Mrs. Livingstone, really reluctant to leave the shivering quartette of girls to venture home alone in the twilight, insisted upon acceptance of her offer, so that in a few moments they were packed into the roomy carriage without more ado and covered over with shawls and rugs by their hostess, who, although suspecting an escapade, was careful to betray no idea of anything being wrong. Margaret, more worried than the others, subsided into the seat beside her cousins, saying as little as possible. Kate, horribly afraid of the scrape in store, which being carried to Maple Grove would but intensify, since Mount Cedar would soon be ringing with their absence, hardly uttered a word. Rose, packed between Kate and Verena on the front seat, kept silently grasping a hand of each under the rug; while the Hungarian, more ready-tongued and less embarrassed than any, did her best to converse and be grateful for them all.

Verena was the only one sufficiently at ease

to take a survey of their new friends when, the carriage having stopped, they were met at the door of a large house by a girl of eleven and an elderly nurse, in white cap and apron, who was appointed to take charge of Kate, Verena and Rose, leading them to a guest chamber upstairs, while poor Margaret was carried off in another direction by Miss Helen, her grave young cousin.

Mrs. Livingstone, having followed the trio, saw them divested of their wet shoes and frocks and wrapped for the nonce in shawls and dressing-gowns, when, telling them to keep quiet a little while and she would send some of her younger daughter's clothes for them to put on until their own were dried, she left them in a condition of suppressed wonder and excitement, not unmixed with dread.

“Too bad to carry off Margaret!” began Kate, whose dumbness vanished the moment she was left alone with her companions in misfortune. “Poor girl, she knows we all need her to pilot us safely among her relatives; and we know she must need us to stand between her and her cousins, and help to head off the charming compliments one's own family are so sure to give one as soon as strangers' backs are turned. I'm certain she's catching it now somewhere in this highly unexceptionable mansion. Oh, girls (jumping up nervously and

walking about in a long white wrapper that trailed behind her on the floor)—we've fallen, I suppose, among good Samaritans, but I tell you one thing—we must keep a sharp lookout upon our P's and Q's in this house!"

"They're 'serious' people; I saw it in the first minute when I caught sight of Mrs. Livingstone and her daughter with Margaret on the bridge, and didn't know who any of them were, except that I felt sure that Margaret couldn't possibly belong to them, unless as a cousin not very near. But dry clothes are dry clothes," went on Verena, wrapping herself up in a shawl and comfortably leaning back in an arm-chair, "and I'm thankful all the same, wherever they come from, aren't you?"

Rose lay on a sofa looking on, silent, puzzled and sad.

"Yes," added Kate, completing her survey of the room. "I know. It's like the Leslie's house. Plenty of good books and Ary Scheffer's pictures. Well!—I comprehend the situation. I've got my rôle settled."

Verena answered with a half-smothered burst of laughter.

"You had good practice in Canada, and can keep up your rôle of a good girl a little longer. Miss Helen is pretty, but, oh, such a grave, critical sort of face! No wonder poor Margaret had a dull visit here! Mind, girls, we're

not to tell our ages unless we're asked. If they fancy us younger, all the better. Yes, Kate, we're going to be very good little girls until we get home—and then?"

"I wish we were there now!" went on Kate. "We might have got back if we had tried. Here's a photo of Helen; I've watched her for years in church; they sit half-way up the middle aisle, and she was confirmed last spring, in a white piqué dress, with her hair put up—I think no girl should be allowed to put up her hair until she leaves school. I can't see the color of her eyes—Verena, give me that lamp."

"You young savage, to be handing round lamps in a strange house!" laughed Verena, as Kate held the shaded light close beneath the photo, while Rose looked on in agony lest she should break or set fire to something. "You are meek shyness itself before strangers, but the moment their backs are turned there's no limit to your audacity."

"I might fare better if I were more audacious," said Kate. "Who was it said that Audacity, Loquacity and Voracity always helped one to get along in this wicked world? Oh, dear, to think how the "General" and all of them must be calling and searching for us everywhere! I hope they won't give our alcoves a domiciliary visit and find sundry fruits and candies tucked away, and confiscate them, and"——

“That reminds me,” broke in Rose; “the nurse who carried off our frocks didn’t give us time to take the candy out of the pockets—oh!”

“We’ll hope to have the candy restored to us, dried along with the frocks; there’s no getting out of the scrape now,” said Verena boldly.

Conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the said nurse bearing a pile of shoes and dresses, from which she begged the guests to select what might fit them best. In her wake followed Margaret, the sight of whom caused a spasmodic laugh, hardly stifled until the nurse had gone, closing the door. Margaret had left them looking altogether like a little girl, younger than her age, with short, wet skirt clinging round her knees. She now came in stumbling over the dress belonging to her cousin, who, though but fifteen, was very much taller than herself, and preferred to anticipate the long skirts of young ladyhood.

“I feel like a caricature of the Kate Greenaway style,” laughed Margaret, turning round. “It’s well the skirt hides my feet, since Helen’s shoes are as much too big for me as her dress. Here, let me help you to put on something—this one is about right for Rose, and you two can forage for yourselves. One thing, girls, I warn you not to say very much about our theatricals or Mrs. Hill’s birthday—though that was only a sort of extra lark, because

the 'General,' for once, chanced to have come back in time for it. Cousin Charles wouldn't mind; he's nice and genial when he gets 'out of bounds' and takes a run over to our house. But Cousin Gertrude—well!—and even Helen," and she meaningly nodded in a way highly intelligible to her auditors, who laughed anew. "If I only could have passed my time here running about with Edith, dear little soul, it would have been charming. But, you see, I am so much nearer Helen's age—she's a million years older than I ever shall be—that she took me into severe custody, and wanted me to sit on the porch and read history with her, and do crochet work, and be a young lady. I hated it, and wanted to be out of doors, and gardening, and going down to the barn to see the animals, and the pussies—they don't approve of cats in this house, except 'in their proper place,' which, we know, means the kitchen or the stable—and jumping rope with Edith, and behaving like a child. So—you see, I don't rank highly in this family, and you will have to rely on your own attractions to get you on. Verena, you look like the good girl in pious juveniles in that white dress. I hope for this evening, at least, you will 'try to live up to it.' "

"Yes, I know I do. Half the wickedness seems taken out of me."

“Only half?” said Kate. “Then there must be plenty left.”

“Now, Rose dear,” added Margaret, “don’t say too much about having run ‘out of bounds’ unless we’re absolutely obliged to. If they question us, we’ll own up to just as much of the candy business as is unavoidable; besides, there’s the candy in our pockets to betray us. I tried to slip out mine as I slipped off my wet frock, but I hadn’t a chance. Don’t mention the apples; that’s unnecessary. You go first, Verena; you’re the boldest and know best how to make conversation among strangers.”

These and other sage counsels did Margaret bestow upon her friends ere they went downstairs in a condition wherein nervousness struggled with a wild determination to gain whatever satisfaction might be wrung out of this adventure before they should be taken home and brought to justice. No one who saw Kate’s utter shyness and shrinking into the background during that evening would have guessed her to be other than the essence of meekness and childish simplicity. Little Rose soon fell into quite a cheerful conversation with Edith in a corner; the only son of the house, being but thirteen, and habitually kept down by mamma and his elder sister, naturally sat rather silent in the presence of so many strange girls, and scarcely opened his lips, save now and

then to smile somewhat furtively when Rose, emboldened by her young hostess's manifest interest in all pertaining to Mount Cedar, ventured to give some slight hints of their most innocent diversions, without mentioning their transgressions. Margaret, being a relative, did not come in for much attention, and the laurels of the evening fell entirely to Verena, as she easily kept up a conversation with Mrs. Livingstone and Helen, cleverly avoiding all dangerous topics, and talking about her foreign schools, expressing an admiration of their strict discipline which won her the approbation of her hostess, who, while guessing her to be older than she looked, refrained from asking any embarrassing questions.

Kate and Margaret, as they owned afterwards, did not dare to meet each other's eyes while listening to the Hungarian's fluent discourse upon studies, gardening, the church music and similar subjects. Able to please whenever she chose, she succeeded so well that by the time dinner had been over for an hour or so, and they had resumed possession of their well-dried shoes and dresses, Mrs. Livingstone had changed her mind with regard to sending a note to Mrs. Hill explaining their prolonged absence, and resolved to drive over and restore them in person.

Sorely dismayed, the quartette, who had

looked forward to being sent home by themselves in the carriage as a fine respite from the long strain of company manners and a chance for discussing the situation, now becoming most terribly serious, were forced to swallow their chagrin and affect great gratitude. Helen, who seemed to have taken a fancy to Verena, showed some wish to accompany them, and Verena felt rather elated at the prospect of astonishing her dignified young hostess by the sight of the Mount Cedar girls in their short dresses, flowing locks and all the exuberant spirits of a set of scholars encouraged to remain children as long as possible. Again she was disappointed, for Mr. Livingstone announced his intention of going with them, and the four truants had hardly packed themselves into the carriage when the solemn old nurse appeared bearing a paper parcel, which she held out, saying it had been forgotten by the young ladies when they had taken their dresses off.

“It’s the candy!” burst out Rose, forgetting caution; while Kate vainly tried to snatch the parcel (all their stock rolled into one) which Rose received and kept holding in a sort of despair.

The storm had long ceased and the wet fields were shining in the light of a clear half-moon. The girls were devoured by anxiety as to their reception at home. Mrs. Livingstone vainly

tried to make them talk; but even Verena's flow of conversation seemed to have deserted her, while the presence of Mr. Livingstone was enough to extinguish Kate. With hearts as heavy as if they had been going to the dentist's the guilty quartette were driven up the hill, and gloomily watched the tall school-building stand out against the sky. The door was not opened until the coachman had rung several times. At length, after what seemed an interminable period of suspense, grim Sandy appeared, with an "unco' solemn" face.

Verena mustered courage to lead the way to the parlor, longing to meet Fanny and afraid of encountering Miss Clive at every turn. Kate, terribly frightened, and nervously fancying that everything unusual (the parlor, to their surprise, proving empty) must be in some way connected with their escapade, or that the whole school had followed the "General" in search of them, seized Margaret's arm and offered to go and look for Mrs. Hill; but her temptation to flee and leave Verena and little Rose in the lurch of having to stay with the company was luckily removed by the entrance of Madame Verrier, who, save poor Dorinda, was the least-dreaded of the teachers, and who was too much taken up with thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Livingstone, relief at seeing the girls back again, and excuses for Mrs. Hill, who, as usual, was indis-

posed, for her to have time to scold or ask any questions. Afraid to move or speak, the four delinquents sat in a row like statues, Rose still clutching the telltale bundle of candies, which it provoked her friends to think she had not had sufficient presence of mind to drop quietly out of the carriage window instead of awkwardly displaying it to everyone.

It might be only their own nervous fancy, but Kate and Margaret, as they sat side by side close to a door, thought that they heard a subdued bustle, a noise of tongues and footsteps overhead. What could it mean? Was there some new freak started among the Thistles which they had missed by reason of their unlucky absence? How unutterably provoking to be kept sitting there like prisoners, with strange visitors, who, as they knew, disapproved of them, and with a scolding in prospect, after all!

CHAPTER XIX.

A COMEDY OF ERRORS.

MOUNT CEDAR, alas! had been turned upside-down on this unlucky evening. The absence of the four girls, discovered about twilight, had, of course, awakened equal anger and anxiety in Miss Clive, who, after having house and grounds thoroughly searched in vain, ordered Jake to get out the omnibus and, in spite of the rain, started on a scouring expedition round the neighborhood. Poor Dorinda was forced to accompany her, and serve as a vent for Miss Clive's baffled energies by meekly submitting to be lectured for her lack of influence over the pupils as they jogged down the hill and along the muddy road, stopping at almost every house to ask news of the girls, but with no result except to hear that they had bought candy at the shop and to be volubly assured by its mistress that the young ladies had left her before the storm began. Miss Clive's uneasiness now knew no bounds; poor Dorinda suffered martyrdom; while Jake, on the box, tried at intervals to help by yelling

right and left to his "dear Miss Katie" to show herself if she were near.

Meanwhile the absence of their comrades had created no little stir among the other girls. Sophie Howard, escaping from the parlor with several of the most unsteady, instituted a private search among all the dormitories and unoccupied rooms until, overcome by wild spirits, they ended their scamper through the upper story by getting out through a trap door upon the nearly flat tin roof, where, the rain having ceased, they proceeded to disport themselves by running, jumping, daring each other to venture as near as possible to the edge, dancing the Lancers by the light of the moon, and, putting their heads down over the tops of the kitchen chimneys, giving utterance to most hideous groans intended to smite with supernatural horror upon the ears of the denizens below. Having, after some half an hour of this delicious pastime, concluded that it would be more prudent to retire and reappear meekly and unsuspectingly, one or two at a time, in the parlor before prayers, they returned, as they thought, to the trap-door which, for greater security, they had closed behind them, but, upon opening, beheld only utter darkness.

"Too bad, they've turned off the light in the entry," muttered the ringleader, Sophie. "Never mind; we can feel our way. I'll go

first," and without more ado she cautiously proceeded to descend backwards, kicking out one foot until it found a resting place.

"It's very strange; the steps seem uncommonly far apart," went on Sophie as, holding on by the edge of the trap-door with both hands, her head sank down below the level of the roof. It was indeed very strange, for the next movement caused a jar and a rattle, while some heavy china article, hit by Sophie's foot, fell with a crash upon the floor.

"You goosey, don't you see you've got down the wrong door?" exclaimed Fanny, who, we regret to say, had shown great zeal in helping to be as wild as possible. "It's the store-room and china closet, the Dragon's own especial territory, and you've smashed something, with a noise fit to rouse the dead, and stuck yourself down there in pitch darkness; and there's a fine piece of work!"

Sophie, giggling, instead of taking her companion's advice and scrambling out as fast as possible, showed a mulish obstinacy in making bad worse by dropping upon the floor, causing another crash in so doing, and groping about in the dark, trying to discover what she had broken. The girls, lying prostrate on the damp roof, with heads thrust over the edge of the trap-door, vainly implored her to reascend, and finally threatened to desert and leave her to her fate.

Curiosity and fellow-feeling, however, still kept them peering down into the darkness, when Sophie, feeling blindly along the shelves by which she had descended, overturned a jar, the contents whereof, lightly rattling down, emitting a dull gleam and a sulphurous odor, sufficiently betrayed their nature to the rash invader, who, seizing one of the lucifers with an exclamation of joy, struck a light whose momentary glare revealed the crowded store-room, shelves covered with crockery, a large soup tureen lying in fragments on the floor, with a paper of brown beans that had been inside of it scattered in all directions, and, unfortunately, a half-covered box containing candles, one of which Sophie seized ere her match expired, lighted, and waved in triumph towards the row of dazzled faces looking down upon her.

“It’s well only we are in it, for it would be worse than Martin’s Hill if it were the Hungarian Demon and all those Gordons,” muttered Fanny, wont to include Kate, Margaret and Rose under the above title, and professing to consider it synonymous with the *ne plus ultra* of wildness. “That clan just beats all creation for carrying on when they once get going! Now, Bear, you’re a far-off shoot thereof yourself, and require looking after, and I won’t let you be so foolish as to go down there; it mayn’t be so easy to get out,” holding

back the young lady, whose first impulse was to descend; while two others, resisting all Fanny's entreaties, lost no time in accepting Sophie Howard's invitation to clamber down and assist in her voyage of discovery.

"Very well," cried Fanny, "please yourselves! You are as old as I, Sophie; and, if you choose to run headlong into hot water, it's not my fault. Stay down there, eating and laughing, till the Dragon hears your noise and catches you. Good-bye," and seizing the Bear's hand, while followed by three other madcaps who had had enough of it and feared the consequences, Fanny left the open trap-door and, hurrying across the roof, soon found the right one, which she softly raised a little in order to reconnoitre before venturing to descend.

It chanced that Elisabeth Armstrong, who, to do her justice, seemed greatly worried when she found that Kate was missing, had been in her tiny room in the top story, and heard the noise of crashing china, with the half-smothered peals of laughter. Thankful, for the first time in her life, to have gained indications of a frolic, since it might prove that the missing girls were in the house after all, she hurried to Miss Almira, who kept the key of the store-room, and who, armed with a candle, lost no time in following her pupil to the upper story, passing

swiftly along the gallery when Fanny, slyly peeping, saw them and whispered:

“Stay here! Keep quiet, while I go and warn the others.”

Running across the roof she paused, breathless, beside the door.

“Come up this moment! The Dragon’s on her way. No time to lose!”

“Nonsense, don’t be fooling us,” said Sophie, busy in trying the contents of a box of raisins, while her companions were liberally supplying themselves with biscuits from a large tin. “Come and join our picnic.”

“Clara Jones, give me that candle,” went on Fanny, unheeding, “and make haste to climb out here while you can.”

Her manner was so determined that the girls, while half-afraid of a hoax, proceeded, laughing, to obey. Miss Almira, unlocking the door a moment after, beheld smashed china, open boxes, scattered provisions, a candle, evidently just extinguished, rolling from the topmost shelf, and beside it the parting glimpse of a pair of red-stockinged legs belonging to the last fugitive as she whisked them up through the trap-door.

“Kate! Verena! Rose! Margaret!” cried Almira and Elisabeth in chorus, never doubting but that the legs just vanished pertained of necessity to one or another of the girls whom they sought.

“She doesn’t call us; so we needn’t answer,” giggled Sophie as they sped across the roof, not so noiselessly, however, but that the tramp of their footsteps was faintly heard down below.

“I think the Evil One is loose to-night!” exclaimed Almira, in despair, surveying the wreck on every side; while Elisabeth, less concerned regarding that especial point than her sister’s prolonged absence, again joined with her in shouting the names of the girls.

While teacher and pupil were thus employed, standing, candles in hand, with their backs towards the door of the store-room, and Sophie Howard, with Fanny and two others, were holding a hurried council of war upon the roof, Sophie Ursula and her three companions remained at first crouching where Fanny had left them until, unable to keep quiet any longer, they softly lifted the trap-door and, finding the gallery deserted, noiselessly crawled down the ladder, one by one. The Little Bear, who came last, thinking it a fine joke to compel those yet aloft to appear and surrender themselves to the authorities, contrived to linger behind and shoot the bolt of the trap, so as to prevent it from being raised from outside. The other three, luckily for themselves, did not wait, but wisely hastened to the school-room and betook themselves to their desks to avoid questioning. The Bear, left alone, ready for any

novelty, seeing lights and hearing voices from the store-room, stole softly along the gallery until she caught sight of the door, which opened outwards, standing ajar, with the key in the lock. In a twinkling she had pushed it to and turned the key, regardless of the cries and protests from within, and was off, with the key in her pocket, running down to the school-room, where she intended to stay until, having given the whole party a good fright, she meant to slip back and release them in time for prayers.

Elisabeth, who was nearest to the door when it was slammed behind her, turned round too late to see who was there, but, never doubting that it was one of Kate's tricks, incited by the "Hungarian Demon," began to rebuke her unruly sister in terms affording huge delight to the unseen audience up above, who were likewise regaled by Miss Almira's eloquent appeal to the supposed truants, to whom she described the distress and commotion occasioned by their absence, with Miss Clive's eager journey in pursuit, adjuring them, by all manner of arguments, to repent, reply and unfasten the door at once.

"What fun, she thinks she's bagged the game, but she hasn't," laughed Sophie Howard, unaware of her teacher's imprisonment, and marveling at the sudden change from lofty wrath to tones of distress arising in both voices,

in beseeching accents from below. "Open the door? What can she mean? Of course we'll open it and go down; but not through her quarters."

"I wish those Thistles would turn up," said Fanny, anxiously. "The joke has gone far enough; though it's unspeakably delicious to have Queen Bess, for once, in a genuine fit of sisterly solicitude about Kate."

"Listen," said another; "the Dragon promises forgiveness, if we only will let her out. What is it? It reminds one of those 'personals' in the papers that say, 'Dear John, come back. All is forgiven.' It must be 'those Gordons,' Fanny, after all; there's certainly something beyond the common afloat to-night, and if Kate and the others aren't in it—they ought to be, for it's worthy of them! Here's our door. Let us go."

"And a pretty mess," exclaimed Sophie Howard; "the door won't open!"

Vainly did the four unite in trying to lift it from the roof.

"Well, I declare!" groaned Sophie anew. "This beats everything! One of those wretched little monkeys of Thistles must have bolted us out."

"It must be the Little Bear," said Fanny. "Don't you remember how, last week, she scared Dorinda nearly to death in the midst of

a grammar lesson by yelling 'centipede!' and pretending that she saw one crawling towards the poor Mouse, who dreads them even more than she dreads Miss Clive, and jumped back, and made a fuss, and quite forgot to ask the Bear some difficult question, which was just what the little rogue wanted. Won't I pay her, though, for this! However, girls, we've no time to lose; I'm chilled already. What shall we do?"

A dismal council of war resulted in perforce resolving, since there was no other way of escape, to make common cause with the pair of captives in the store-room, whom they, however, as yet did not know to be captives, but faintly hoped might be disposed to exercise mercy.

"Rats in a trap, after all!" groaned Sophie, as they once more tramped across the roof. "I'll be steady for a month if I only get out of this!"

"Miss Almira!" cried Fanny, who, being the bravest, stepped forward, bending down her face above the opening, while the rest cowered behind.

"Frances!" exclaimed the Dragon, sternly; "are you in this, too? What does it mean? Where are those children? Who has locked this door?"

"Upon my honor, Miss Almira, I know

nothing of them," Fanny answered earnestly. "I wish they were here to speak for themselves. No one is here except Sophie Howard, Clara Jones, Agnes Lyman and myself."

"Who, I ask, dared to slam this door and lock us up in this room?" screamed the Dragon, half-wild with very natural rage and disappointment, brandishing her candle at arm's length almost in the bent-down faces and drooping hair of the four girls looking over the edge of the trap-door. "What am I to think? One of them locked us in here not long ago."

"For all I know, there may be any number of them tearing about and playing tricks," resumed Fanny, undismayed, longing to laugh; while Queen Bess kept up a sort of excited running comment which nobody heeded just then. "Sophie Ursula was here, with Emily Vane and two others. They left us a little while ago. One of them must have fastened the trap-door by which we came out, and have locked your door afterwards."

Almira's intended outburst against the smasher of so much china was diverted for the moment from its proper object as she wildly proceeded to question the delinquents concerning their frolic; while Elisabeth, bent on believing the other culprits to be somewhere lurking in that story, wasted a large amount of strength and patience by madly rattling at the unyielding door.

"It won't open, and we four couldn't raise the other trap-door; and nobody will hear us unless we all scream together," said Fanny, serene amid the increasing tumult. "Is there any other way of getting inside?"

"There's a tiny trap-door opening into Sandy's room, far over yonder," said the Dragon, her anger, always apt to be short-lived, much subdued by the need for instant action and by finding that the most guilty parties were not before her. "Help me to get up out there, children, and perhaps we may manage to rouse somebody to let us in."

Sophie and her pair of wild comrades had hard work to resist their spasmodic desire to laugh as they joined with Fanny in assisting Miss Almira and her by no means agile head-pupil to clamber up the shelves, and, not without much difficulty, to scramble out upon the roof.

"Hurrah, this *is* spicy!" whispered the incorrigible Thistle as her teacher slowly and fearfully trod upon the tin covering of the roof, which creaked beneath her footsteps. "We're revenged now on the Dragon; and as for Queen Bess, her majestic gravity is all knocked out of her."

"Keep quiet, and don't rouse the Dragon any worse," muttered Fanny; "we haven't begun to see the end of this matter yet!"

Sandy, whom Mrs. Hill had dispatched upon a fruitless quest after the girls among the small houses in the neighborhood, had returned in no very good humor, and was in his room, taking off his boots, wet with trudging through damp fields, when a loud rapping on the roof above his head caused him to start up and stand, a boot in one hand, and a hastily snatched-up pistol in the other, ready to receive whatever "bogle" or burglar might invade his premises, with a defiant look upon his grewsome face that changed to one of wholly unspeakable amazement as the trap-door, slowly lifted back, disclosed the unexpected vision of poor Miss Almira's stern yet woe-begone countenance.

"Alexander, don't shoot!" she called to the puzzled champion of Mrs. Hill's abode, who, with uplifted arms, stood prepared to assume the defensive; while the girls, peeping from behind, exploded with irrepressible mirth (wherein even Queen Bess is said to have condescended to join), and Sandy, slowly regaining his wits, as he laid down both boot and pistol, and evidently supposing that only the finding of the truants could possibly account for Miss Almira's extraordinary situation, solemnly began to congratulate her upon the "puir young leddies" being found at last.

The Dragon (to the disappointment of the girls, who had counted on the fun of seeing

her and Elisabeth compelled to sacrifice their dignity afresh by having to seek Sandy's aid to descend gracefully through his sanctum) cut short his astonished exclamations by sending him to unbolt the trap-door in the gallery; which being performed, the party again crossed the roof and came down into the house. Their absence had caused such uneasiness to Madame that, afraid to trust any more pupils out of her sight, she made a general levy from parlor and school-room, and went in search of the rest with a troop at her heels that, encountering the heroines of the roof, occasioned the noise and talking which so puzzled the original culprits as they sat below. The reappearance of Sandy with the news that he had just let in the young leddies, with a strange leddy and gentleman, called away Madame and left Almira in sole command of a chattering crowd, all too excited to heed her repeated orders for silence; some jesting and laughing, and others venting their spirits by teasing Queen Bess, who, now that she knew Kate to be safe indoors, resumed her haughtiness and tried to scold down the rest, until Miss Almira effected a diversion by sending her to tell poor, worried Mrs. Hill that the girls were found.

Mr. and Mrs. Livingstone departing as soon as civility permitted, were met on the road by the omnibus with Miss Clive, who, after vainly

seeking the truants through the town, had driven to the police station and given the officials a full description of the runaways, for whom they were to make instant search. Thankful though she was to know them in safety, her manner, even while striving to be grateful, was so curt and haughty that Mrs. Livingstone, when she heard of all the trouble, sorely regretted that she had let kindly feelings, together with practical considerations of convenience, outweigh her first intention of turning about and driving them to Mount Cedar at once. Shy Miss Dorinda, regardless of the risk of being snubbed as soon as she was alone with Miss Clive, for once rose to the height of the emergency in a way which would have gained her the respect of her pupils had they known of it, by thanking the Livingstones in Mrs. Hill's name with a heartiness that helped to atone for the indignant "General's" lack of courtesy.

There were too many separate accounts to be settled for anything to be done that evening; and the numerous culprits, as yet unquestioned, were marched in to prayers, in no very prayerful mood. Miss Clive, for once with good reason feeling by no means satisfied with the result of her labors to make her scholars, as Frau Schulze said, "*Frisch, fröhlich, fromm*,

und frei,"* and to be herself head-teacher, vice-president, general, doctress, clergywoman, stage-manager, drill-sergeant, chief of police and *Primum Mobile* of Mount Cedar all in one, read through the prayers in a stern yet absent manner, and, without apparently heeding what she was doing, gave out the hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light," in which Verena's voice led the contraltos with as much power and pathos as if she had been anything rather than one of the very worst and prickliest Thistles, now expecting to be brought to justice. Poor little Rose was less brave in defying the unutterable looks of Miss Almira and Elisabeth, opposite to her, and began to falter when, at the line

"The night is dark, and I am far from home," the incorrigible Kate glanced over at her with a slight nod and thousandth part of a smile, which evidently meant an allusion to this evening's wanderings. Rose gave a faint gasp, but recovered herself until the words,

"I loved to choose and see my path," when Kate's repressed mischief broke out into an unmistakable smile that obliged Rose to leave off singing and put up her handkerchief to her mouth. Margaret Gordon and Sophie

* Fresh, merry, pious, and free. The motto adopted by the young German "*Turner*," or "*Gymnasts*," who united for the future liberation of their Fatherland during its oppression under Napoleon I.

Ursula maintained their likeness by breaking simultaneously into a most undignified broad grin; Sophie Howard giggled outright, Verena's eyes fairly danced with mirth. Fanny, hitherto of most exemplary gravity, now entangled herself in the matter by bestowing a series of very energetic and imploring glances upon the culprits; while Miss Clive, now fully roused, only waited for the hymn to be finished in order to begin an allocution to the whole troop, wherein general and special misdeeds were handled without mercy, and those guilty of adding levity of demeanor to their other evil doings were threatened with undefined but severe measures, justly surmised to signify expulsion from the school.

Fanny and Verena contrived to meet and edify each other with a recital of their various adventures the next morning, before the same were duly inquired into by Miss Clive in full court-martial after school. Punishment was awarded in no small measure to the truants, and much in the way of bad marks to the party on the roof, especially to the ringleader, Sophie Howard, who had to pay for the china she had broken. The Little Bear, who, though mischievous, was not deceitful, anticipated being brought to justice by boldly confessing how she had fastened the doors, and bearing her penalty with the others. Mrs. Hill, much dis-

tressed by these additional proofs that the great defect of her school was a lack of strong moral earnestness, summoned the truants to a private interview that evening, from which they, being well frightened and subdued, returned, if not really as penitent as she desired, yet far better disposed to behave themselves than they had ever been during this eventful summer, when, as Sophie Ursula described it, long afterwards, "We were all so dreadfully bad, and had such a heavenly time of it!"

CHAPTER XX.

ADVENTURES.

PUNISHMENT could not last forever, and, when the absent scholars returned in September, the resumption of their ordinary routine only seemed to raise the spirits of the prickliest Thistles, and especially of Verena, who had never ceased to regret the stir and excitement of her first three months at school. It was true that she had recently enjoyed a slight novelty in the acquaintance which the intelligent but far too grave and sedate Miss Helen Livingstone had chosen to strike up with her young guest of that rainy evening, coming over to Mount Cedar to visit her cousin Margaret Gordon in order to cultivate the fascinating foreigner. Margaret, being as young for her years in many ways as Helen was old for hers, soon saw through the flimsy pretext of wanting her society, and privately edified her comrades by plain statements causing much amusement. The pupils who arrived this autumn were put into other classes, and Margaret still enjoyed the distinction of being the latest comer of Kate's set, as much

at home among the Thistles as if she had been there for years. Wild though she was out of school hours, her standing in her classes was high from the beginning, and "Foxey" soon began to agree with the Hungarian that Kate's position in some things was likely to be endangered by a powerful rival at last.

Miss Benson and Miss Dorinda, one golden September afternoon, were dispatched by Mrs. Hill upon an errand immediately after the early dinner, expecting to return in time for the gymnastic lesson which, in fine weather, was now held partly in the open air, Frau Schulze having been ill and not yet able to resume her visits. Eager for the pleasure of a walk "out of bounds," a train of six Thistles asked and won permission to accompany them; and it hardly need be mentioned that this train consisted of Cornie, Fanny, Verena, Margaret, Sophie Ursula and Kate.

Starting demurely, two by two, their exemplary demeanor gradually relaxed into a general straggling ahead of their teachers. Cornie found it impossible not to gather up some of the beautiful rosy apples which had fallen from the overhanging boughs. Kate, the Little Bear and Margaret wanted to stop and caress every cat, dog, sheep, mule and calf that they saw. Fanny and Verena, when ordered by Miss Benson not to walk out of hearing, per-

sisted in talking German, to the discomfiture of their teachers, who imagined them to be concocting treason, but were forced to accept the excuse that Miss Clive liked them to practice that language with the Hungarian, in order to improve themselves.

“Well,” began Cornie, “it’s the first walk, I do believe, that we have been allowed to take since the Martin’s Hill affair. I wonder they are not afraid to trust six Thistles out in a bunch!”

“Yes,” said the Bear; “especially since my delightful double has doubled our frolics. You should have been here, Cornie, one evening when we were supposed to be still *en pénitence* for going on the roof. Madame had begun an exhortation upon morals and manners, and we were all sitting mouse-still, when what must Margaret do but leap up, with the most natural air of consternation, screaming, “A bat, a bat!” We knew, of course, that it was just a dodge to stop the lecture, but we jumped up and rushed about, and yelled, and set off Bess and the elder ones, who covered their heads and scampered out. But the best fun was to see how poor Madame bounced from her seat and looked up, fancying she saw the bat circling overhead, and imploring us to help her drive out the ‘*chauve-souris*.’ We kept on screeching to our hearts’ content, until we

feared she might smoke us; so I upset some chairs and Verena turned off the gas, while Kate pretended to help Margaret drive the little fellow out of the window, and we quieted down; but there was no more of a lecture."

(It may be here mentioned that Margaret's device to cut the lecture short, probably suggested by the Little Bear's previous trick of raising an alarm of a centipede, was not long after improved upon, with yet more audacity, by Sophie Ursula herself. Having discovered a nest of the "*chauve-souris*" in a shed, she skilfully captured one of the young bats in her handkerchief, hid him in a paper box full of air-holes in her desk, and, having duly prepared him for his adventures by smuggling to him some milk from her own supper, managed to take him, box and all, into the parlor, and let him loose just in the middle of the hymn. His appearance, being equally sudden and genuine, created a violent commotion among the whole assemblage and a yet greater enjoyment for the author of this irreverent freak, who afterwards received the private congratulations of the rest of the ungodly—her willing "accomplices after the fact," as a lawyer would call it.)

Their errand was soon over; and it was yet early in the bright September afternoon when they started homewards, at the girl's urgent

entreaty going along the bank of the river, intending to make a short cut across the high ground to the school. The day seemed less like early autumn than the end of summer; tall flowers stood by the roadside, wild grapes were beginning to turn purple on the tangled vines that trailed in festoons across the evergreens, the Indian corn stood waving on the distant slopes in the sunshine. The spirits of the youthful party grew yet more jubilant, and they scattered right and left along the highway, beside the water, gathering fruit and flowers. Poor Dorinda was powerless to restrain them, and little Miss Benson, though efficient in her way among the smaller girls, proved quite incompetent to drive six such wild ponies at once. The river shone at their feet in the golden sunlight; the bank rose steep and high. Verena, full of delight at thus rambling in the open country, ran, followed by Kate and Margaret, to the top of a mass of rock that sloped gradually up from the road on one side, and on the other hung precipitously over the river, leaving a narrow, sandy strip of beach around its base.

“Hurrah!” cried Kate, spreading out her arms; “this seems like being

“ ‘On a rock, whose haughty brow
Frowns o’er old Conway’s foaming flood,’

or like something in the allegories, and fairy tales, and unlike school."

"It seems like looking out into another country—or another world," said Margaret, who, though full of nonsense, was quite as imaginative as Verena or Kate. "Hush, Bear, don't keep shouting at us from down there that 'with haggard eyes the poet stood.' We're not to be silenced even by you when we get going on about things you don't understand."

"It makes me wish, like Faust, to be able to soar away into that golden light," said Verena, looking out into the dazzling west.

Miss Benson and Dorinda had by this time come up to the party, trying to collect their scattered forces. Cornie, reappearing with a lapful of apples she had gathered, undertook to arouse the attention of the three girls, who kept talking, unconscious of a repeated summons. Holding up her skirt, Cornie started at full speed up the gentle slope. The slant was so gradual and her limbs so strong that she arrived only too quickly at the top, and, unable to stop herself, ran full tilt against the girls as they stood poetizing, with their backs to her. Cornie's laughing exclamation rose into a cry of terror as the three, thus struck from behind, started, lost their balance, and fell over the edge, screaming and clinging to each other. When Miss Benson had run around to the

farther side, she beheld the frightened Cornie slowly gathering up her sturdy form from its prostrate position on top of the rock, while the ripe red apples were leaping and rolling in all directions. Down below, where a deep bed of soft mud intervened between the water and the road, she saw Margaret extricating herself from a sort of mud-bath into which, luckily, she had plunged without serious injury, save to her well-begrimed hands, dress and shoes; while a pair of small, trembling figures emerged yet more slowly, and dripping, from the shallow water.

"Don't come near me," cried Margaret, evidently more hurt than she chose to confess. "I'm all mud."

"Don't touch me, for your own sakes, girls!" cried Kate, as they first pressed forward and then drew back from her, as she stood shaking herself like a Newfoundland dog after a bath. "I'm only bruised!"

"I wish I could say the same!" groaned Verena, with a frantic effort to look cheerful. "I struck upon a big stone down in the water, and seem to have broken my arm, for I can't make it move."

Five minutes of anxious consultation served only too clearly to establish the fact that Verena's right arm was fractured half-way between the wrist and elbow; her head was

bleeding from a gash, and both she and Kate, in addition to their drenching, were far too much bruised and shaken to be able to walk home.

“I’ll run back across the fields and have Jake sent with the omnibus,” said poor Cornie, full of unavailing remorse.

“You will do no such thing,” said Miss Benson sternly. “You have done enough to make trouble already, Cornelia Freeman, by your childish awkwardness. You will remain here and not go roaming by yourself.”

“We ought to have a hero come to set the broken bone, like Doctor Antonio, in that lovely novel,” whispered Kate to Verena as they sat shivering, side by side, on the lower slope of the rock. “Oh, if”——

“Katharine, this is no time for jesting!” began little Miss Benson, who, when worried, was apt to call her pupils by their full names, in imitation of Miss Clive. “And you, Cornelia,” turning to the culprit, with an effort to make her short, squat figure appear majestic alongside of her tall, well-built scholar, “tuck up your dress and help me to wring some of the water out of these clothes.” Cornie, with the salt water beginning to stream from her own eyes, proceeded silently to obey; while Fanny whispered to the Little Bear, “Poetic justice for once! Verena took poor Cornie’s

old friend away and made her ten times wilder—and now she is being accidentally punished for it by Cornie herself.”

The shrewd “Foxey” might have added that Kate, though to all appearance punished likewise, probably found her chief punishment in the fact that she was hardly hurt worth mentioning, only bruised, and drenched, and shaken, in an undignified, prosaic, unpleasant way; while Verena came in for all the fuss, and the sympathy, and the much-admired heroism which her friend secretly envied her for being so well able to display to an attentive audience. Suffering, but resolute, and inwardly well sustained by the interest she excited, the Hungarian sat patiently in her dripping garments on the ledge of the rock in the afternoon sunshine. The pair of anxious teachers consulted together. Fanny, Cornie and Sophie Ursula tried, in their different ways, to show their sympathy for the sufferers.

No one thought much about Margaret Gordon, who had withdrawn a little from the others, trying to wipe off some of the heavy, clinging mud. When Miss Benson again looked round after her, she was not among them, and a second glance showed the girl’s small figure briskly running back along the road. A summons to return was disregarded, and Miss Benson’s heavy form was not likely to

overtake the light-footed maiden, who, without once looking behind, sped on until she had climbed a fence, and, rather more slowly, had begun to mount the rising ground, toiling, in her mud-stained garments, over grass and stones, until the clumps of bushes hid her from sight.

Vainly did both teachers and pupils unite in calling after her until they were hoarse. Miss Benson's supposition that she was running to Mount Cedar for assistance was precluded by the fact that she had gone in an opposite direction; and Kate wildly fancied for a moment that she might be hastening to her cousin's distant house. It was not the case; still, this conjecture (which Kate, however, thought it best not to mention) was somewhat nearer to the truth.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARGARET'S INSPIRATION.

EXULTING in what she knew to be a justifiable act of disobedience, Margaret Gordon went on mounting the hillside, often, as soon as she was out of danger of molestation from her own party, compelled to stop and rest on mossy stumps, with the cheerful grasshoppers leaping round her, to regain breath and nerve her weary limbs to press forward.

The uncultivated field was one in which she would gladly have lingered for hours among the wild flowers, sweet-scented thyme and pennyroyal, blackberry bushes and tiny evergreens. There were the yellow evening primroses and the gleaming golden-rod, soft, furry-coated mulleins and purple Scotch thistles she could not now spare time to gather. Was she in time, after all, she anxiously asked herself, looking up towards the sky line, where in full relief against the western light she saw, like a black silhouette, the outline of a man seated on a camp-stool, surrounded by sketching materials, a large, folded umbrella beside him

on the ground, an open box, a portfolio and a brown collie dog, who appeared (like the noble pair in the picture of Landseer and his four-footed critics) to be watching the progress his master was making in the rough sketch of a fine gray mule, who was leisurely cropping the grass. Margaret, having found the person she was seeking, began to suffer from exhaustion, and simply exclaiming, "Cousin Augustine!" wearily dropped upon a stump a few feet from the gentleman, who looked up in cheerful surprise, answering, "Margaret Gordon, how did you ever get here?"

He might have been some years past thirty, but had something frank, merry and boyish in his face. He wore a very low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat and a strange-looking suit of dark flannel, which would have made some persons set him down for an artist or a foreigner at once. His features were well-turned and strong, the hair and beard thick, curling and of the darkest brown. The whole face was rendered thoroughly genial by the large, deeply set, luminous brown eyes, full of mirth and honest kindness as they darted about with an artist's quick, penetrating glance.

"I caught a glimpse of you up here as we came along," gasped Margaret. "Helen said you were coming for a visit—oh—I'm so glad!"

Her breath failed, but her relative (first

cousin to her mother, and also first cousin of the owner of Maple Grove) by degrees drew from her a brief, clear account of the emergency, meanwhile putting up his belongings and preparing to start.

"I'll come at once, of course. You were right, Margaret, to scamper off without leave, for I don't suppose your teacher would have heard of permitting you to summon me—and I'll put matters right for you with your parents if you get scolded. But you are all trembling and seem utterly used up. Are you hurt?"

"Only some hard bruises on my knees when I plumped down, ten feet or more, into the mud and grazed on some stones. It was lucky I didn't fall into the water, like the others, for then I couldn't possibly have come up here after you. I feel it more now than at first, when I move."

"You had better not move—though I don't see how else you are to get away from this place," said Augustine Livingstone as, his preparations finished, he summoned his faithful dog and gave him orders to remain, guarding his possessions, until his return. "There—take my arm, Margaret, walk very slowly, and stop every few moments to rest. It was very like a Gordon for you to take the law this way into your own hands, or, rather, into your feet, by rushing after me at once. I have heard tales

about that school of yours, and how your friends have named you 'the Lion,' because of your fine tawny mane and general prowess; and how you and some more were caught playing truant in the storm," and the artist pealed out with a hearty laugh, like a boy.

"I don't mind your hearing tales, if I escape coming in for a private court-martial at home," said Margaret, slowly limping along, but emboldened to regale her indulgent cousin by a spicy account of the adventures of that evening, and of the party on the roof, whereat he laughed until he fairly reeled, making her laugh in turn by pretending to fear lest he should pass for tipsy if seen by the rural public as they approached the road. Margaret's exhaustion had by this increased to such a degree that Augustine thought it best to persuade her to stop and rest in a small cottage belonging to a decent old colored woman, a relative of Jake, while he himself hurried on to the scene of the accident, where the disconsolate teachers were just deciding that it might be best for Miss Benson to remain with Fanny, Verena and Kate, while Miss Dorinda, escorted by Cornie and Sophie Ursula, should go home and send Jake with the omnibus.

"Here is the hero coming, just like 'Doctor Antonio,' after all!" whispered Kate to the Little Bear as her keen eyes caught sight of a

tall man striding across the field up which Margaret had disappeared. "Oh, Verena," she added, below her breath, "if the Princess were only here instead of the Mouse—it's just like a story"——

Verena managed to nod, though unequal to much conversation; while the excited Sophie Ursula joined Kate in watching the movements of the stranger, now drawing very near, both congratulating themselves, in their merry, foolish hearts that it was "like a story," and that they seemed to be in for a real adventure at last. While they were thus, as it were, preparing to fall in love by proxy, on the "Princess's" account, the unconscious hero of their romance, after clearing the roadside fence with an agility which exalted him yet higher in their estimation, gravely marched up to the wondering party and introduced himself to Miss Dorinda, explaining Margaret's action and present whereabouts, and begging them to accept his services in getting the young ladies home, advising them to betake themselves at once to Polly Handy's cottage to wait, under cover, until dry clothing could be fetched from the school.

"You can't stay here much longer, or your pupils will catch their deaths of cold," said Livingstone with decision. "A broken arm, head badly cut and bruises all over! I will

carry her myself to the cottage, and try to procure what is most needed, and, as soon as I have set her arm"—

"Then you are a doctor, sir?" Miss Benson broke in abruptly.

"No; I am now a painter; but my father was a surgeon, and I have studied medicine myself and know something about broken bones and such things," said the stranger, smiling. "It may be hours before you can get a physician; so you had better let me try what I can do."

"He's 'Doctor Antonio' and an artist rolled into one—how charming!" was, of course, Kate's inward comment, which helped mightily to console her for the wetting, and the bruises, and the being very unimportant, and, moreover, being sharply told by Miss Benson to keep silent and give no unnecessary trouble. The stranger then stepped up to where Verena sat crouching upon the rock and examined her arm, putting several questions gently, but with an air of quiet resolution which, together with the pain she was suffering, rendered her for once as meek as possible.

"You must let me fix your arm in a sling," said Augustine, as he arranged a large handkerchief so as to support the injured member. "There! Can you stand?" Verena, her black brows knit together with pain, rose to her feet with difficulty, while the water streamed from

her dress from beneath the shawl Miss Dorinda had flung round her. Miss Benson, frowning, wrung out the wet draperies anew, eyeing Verena with a cold, reproachful glance, as the cause of so much worry (this under-teacher belonged to that class of persons who incline to consider illness or physical disability of any sort in the light of an affront to themselves). Augustine gently lifted the Hungarian as if she had been a child of four years old, and, telling the others to follow, set off slowly across the meadows, with the disconsolate female train at his heels. Verena must have been more shaken than they fancied, for her head sank helplessly upon the shoulder of her bearer, and she uttered not a word. Kate, slowly tramping along in her wet garments, leaning on poor, troubled Cornie's strong arm, felt divided between genuine distress about Verena and irrepressible excitement at the adventure, gazing so earnestly after the stranger that Fanny, as might have been expected, began to tease her unmercifully.

"You goose, you're losing your heart at first sight, in that silly, sentimental way that you're always laughing at," said this outspoken young woman.

"It wouldn't be much wonder if she did, for he's just like a big, beautiful Newfoundland dog," broke in Sophie Ursula; which singular compliment was well known by the Thistles to

be the very highest praise that the Little Bear was ever heard to bestow.

An hour later and Augustine Livingstone's long legs were rapidly carrying him across the high ground that rose up from the river and terminated in the hill whereon Mount Cedar Seminary stood. Low down upon the slopes the corn was waving and rustling in the splendid autumn sunshine; the ground was bright with great golden pumpkins and scarlet tomatoes; in the orchards the yellow apples were weighing down the boughs. The painter was hurried and anxious, yet he could not help turning in the midst of his headlong progress through thickets and over fences to look with an artist's eye at the wide panorama spread out before him. Below lay the fertile, rolling country, with the little town nestling in its center; far away yonder rose a range of hills, with the river winding in a gleaming line into the distance. Before it reached the hilltop the orchard ended in a vegetable garden, gay with many-colored growths, through which the stranger swiftly sped, and, leaping the paling-fence, found himself in a half-cultivated, grassy spot full of tiny fir trees, white wild carrots blooming, low trellises whence grapevines clambered to twine themselves among the branches of the quince trees, feathery asparagus bushes bright with scarlet berries, and clusters of tall sunflowers.

Beyond, at some distance, arose group after group of dark cedars, firs and pines, now planted in broad circles upon the lawn, now shading wide walks that led in winding curves towards the large gray building upon the summit of the slope.

In one direction he beheld a variegated mass of tiny plantations side by side, as if belonging to the scholars; and, nearer to the house, behind a wooden fence, he caught sight of the tops of various swings and bars arranged for gymnastic exercises out of doors. The maple-shaded path he was following seemed to lead farther away from the school, so he struck directly across the lawn, pausing for breath in the center of a circle of evergreens within a few paces of the flag-paved walk. Augustine took off his wide-brimmed hat and looked out from between the branches towards the house. Not usually troubled with much shyness, he yet felt a reluctance to go onward and disturb this rural paradise with his unwelcome presence and more unwelcome news. While he thus stood lingering, the fresh breeze, sweeping downwards from the hilltop, brought with it the measured tramp of feet and a sudden burst of loud, wild, martial-sounding music.

Augustine stood still among the branches and glanced along the walk. Yonder, in the chequered sunlight, a train of girls came march-

ing step by step to the air that must have sounded from a musical instrument hidden somewhere among the trees. On they swept, two by two, all clad alike in simple, short gray dresses, bareheaded, with long, loose hair floating behind them as they moved, the youngest leading the procession, in their kilt-like tunics and scarlet stockings, which flashed brightly in and out among the dark fir boughs as they gathered, separated, countermarched and performed a variety of soldier-like manoeuvres, apparently under the guidance of a leader as yet unseen. There were not over eighty girls, yet, as they wound to and fro, they seemed like thrice the number. As the wild and solemn measure of the Russian national hymn passed into a gayer one, the close phalanx broke into a single file and darted away down the avenue, returning by another path, but in different order.

Each girl came bearing a long, slender wand, her outspread arms and hands drooping over it as it lightly rested on her shoulders. Sweeping onward, past the stranger's hiding-place, the whole train, as though at a given signal, suddenly wheeled about and dashed down the ends of their wands upon the ground, each light staff striking with a sharp ring against the smooth flagstones as the maiden procession stood facing towards the school, still, flushed,

expectant, each right hand holding the wand like a musket reversed, while the left hung by her side. The music kept on sounding; the train stood motionless in two long lines on either side of the wide walk, as though awaiting some one.

And now she came, the hitherto unseen Diana of all these nymphs, sweeping through the open ranks that silently closed up behind her as she moved. Taller than her tallest pupil, yet not looking many years older, with slightly aquiline, chiseled features and a majestic, uplifted head, crowned with thick black braids that would have reached to her knees. Her eyes were very dark and full, the eyebrows black and resolute, but the deep brunette coloring was enriched and softened by a brilliant, glowing complexion, while an expression of keen girlish enjoyment helped, for the moment, to subdue the firm outlines of her mouth.

Her dress was simple, dark and flowing, hardly reaching to the ground, while gathered in by a red leather belt and relieved by a broad scarlet ribbon, apparently some sort of badge or symbol, which she wore over the left shoulder like a baldric. Round her neck was a long black velvet band, from which hung a large gold locket that glittered and sparkled on her breast. Her right hand supported a wand held upright against her shoulder like a mus-

ket. As she passed, and the music again pealed out into the wild, mournful, yet triumphal chorus of the Russian hymn, each girl raised her own staff into the same position, while the whole troop, two by two, faced round and stood as though ready to follow her down the wide sloping walk, between the cedars, in the deep, purple, September afternoon shadows.

“Splendid creature—can she be only a school-teacher?” Augustine thought. “Not a trace of that weary, professional, unmistakable look those poor women always get about her. How I should like to paint her as she marches, with that superb erectness! She’s like the Diana in the Louvre—quite another type from that squat little chunk down there by the river, and her pale, shy companion. These blooming scholars have a leader worthy of them and of this breezy, pine-scented Paradise.”

And here he stopped short, for Miss Clive, slowly treading in time to the martial music, had reached the farther end of her file of young soldiers and seemed about to lead the column onwards, when the painter, with an effort, for he longed to continue watching, brushed aside the heavy, trailing boughs of cedar and emerged from his ambush, in full sight of the astonished maiden train, and directly in front of their no less astonished leader, who coolly surveyed the intruder with what Mrs. Browning

calls "level-fronting eyelids," and without a word.

"I ought to ask pardon," began Augustine, absurdly conscious of a most boyish and reprehensible inclination to laugh while this stately Diana stood gazing at him as though she would have liked to inflict upon him the punishment of Actaeon. "Am I addressing Miss Clive?"

The lady mentioned gravely bowed.

"I came with a message from—Miss Davis, I think, was the name," he added, somewhat hesitatingly, for poor Dorinda's name and identity were fast growing faint in his memory as he stood face to face with this magnificent creature who looked as if she belonged to another world from the one inhabited by her shrinking subordinate. Miss Clive's eyes, already dilated, grew more searching and eager as he spoke. She had been greatly worried by the non-appearance of her six pupils, and now her firm, beautifully chiseled lips parted with a half-checked exclamation of affright. She stood quite still, her form thrown out in full relief against the dark boughs, both strong, slender hands clasped upon the top of her wand that she had let slide down suddenly to the ground.

"One of your young ladies has broken her arm," he went on hurriedly, deeming it only merciful to inform her of the extent of the acci-

dent at once. "She fell from a rock beside the river and struck against some stones—a very handsome, dark, foreign-looking little girl"—

"Verena Forster!" cried Miss Clive, much worried. There seemed to be no end to the trouble she was to have about this girl, after all. She knit her black brows and compressed her lips as before, while Augustine gave her a brief account of how he had been summoned to the assistance of the distressed party by his little cousin, taking care to dwell upon Margaret's sense and presence of mind in boldly dashing off to where she knew he might be found, wishing to avert any unpleasant consequences from her head when she should return. What would Kate have felt had she known that, while Margaret's exertions in climbing the steep hillside with her aching limbs and wounded knees received full praise from her kinsman, her own wet, bruised condition won scarcely a brief mention from this new hero of hers, who went on, recurring to Verena, "A very remarkable child. She hardly uttered a complaint, and when I was going to set her arm, before it should become swollen"—

"Set her arm?" Miss Clive repeated, in surprise. "I thought, sir, you said that you were an artist."

"So I am, now; but I first studied medicine,

and, when I was in the army, during the Civil War, I often found an opportunity for exercising whatever skill I had in that line," he replied, noticing meanwhile that Miss Clive's stern face relaxed and brightened at his words. She was the daughter of an officer, and her name of the "General" had not been bestowed upon her in vain. So he had been a soldier, after all, this abrupt stranger, in his wild flannel suit and great wide-awake hat, which might have done for Garibaldi himself. She began to feel more respect for this new acquaintance, who continued, "I was about to say that this little girl, when I had carried her to the cottage of an old colored woman, begged me not to wait until I should procure some chloroform, but to set her arm at once. She clenched her teeth and bore it with scarcely a groan. (It may be imagined what a sensation the recital of Verena's prowess was creating among the listening troop of girls.) She seemed faint afterwards, as was to be expected, so I hurried off to tell you that Miss—ah—Miss Davis desires that you will kindly send the omnibus and two complete changes of clothing for the young ladies to the cottage of old Polly Handy, whom your coachman will soon find, or, if you should prefer it, I will show him there myself."

"I think perhaps I had better go to join them," said Miss Clive, with just the faintest

soupçon of an emphasis upon the pronoun which smote only too audibly upon the ear of the sensitive artist, who, feeling as though he were receiving his dismissal, stepped back a pace or two, and bowing low, with a "Certainly, madam," was about to depart by a short cut at once.

"Stop!" cried Miss Clive, suddenly raising her right hand as Augustine turned away. "Wait, I mean, Mr. Livingstone, won't you? We are under great obligations to you, and I thank you heartily, in the name of Mrs. Hill, for all your kindness. Will you not, at least, permit us to drive you back?"

Augustine, quite pacified, gently interrupted her.

"Thank you, but I have left my whole sketching apparatus yonder in the field, with my dog in charge, and I feel in duty bound to the faithful creature not to keep him waiting there too long or to give the young colts who were frisking about an opportunity of eating up the sketch I was beginning, when Margaret arrived, of a fine mule"——

"So you paint animals?" said Miss Clive, with some interest.

"Often; but I am not enough of a Landseer or a Rivière to make them my sole specialty and devote myself chiefly to figure painting. I wished for my sketch book just now, when I

saw you heading your procession," he added, somewhat nervously, for this ex-warrior wanted to pay Miss Clive a compliment, and did not at all know how to do it. "Those bright, blooming young creatures, darting to and fro among the trees, make a sight such as a painter may be pardoned for wishing to be able to fix forever, and I did not watch them merely with the eye of an artist, for, soldier as I am, I could not but be struck by the extreme precision of their drill—the cadets at West Point hardly could do better. But I am detaining you," he wound up quickly, seeing that he had gained his object of pleasing the lady by his praise of the girls' marching and the military allusion, and was therefore well contented to depart.

Miss Clive's adieu to the stranger, who went off with rapid strides across the grass, was rendered rather shorter and less ceremonious than she had intended by the unpleasant necessity of turning round to rebuke a faint titter that arose from some of the smaller girls, who found the compliment to their drill (which, in reality, should have been given to Frau Schulze) entirely too charming to be listened to with becoming gravity. The "General" slowly lifted up the wand whereon she had been leaning for the last few moments, shouldered it as before, and led her troop towards the house. Augustine, half-way down to the lawn,

turned to look once more at the girlish procession as it vanished up the long, shady vista among the cedars; but in another moment the music ceased, and the whole fair train, with their stately leader, had passed onward out of sight.

CHAPTER XXII.

BOTTOM AND TITANIA.

“**U**RSULA SOPHIA WAGNER, will you never learn how to restrain yourself, even in an emergency?” was Miss Clive’s exclamation as she alighted from the omnibus, a few steps from old Polly Handy’s cottage, which stood just within a meadow, bordering on a quiet lane. Margaret was sitting on a bench, drawn a little way from the house, and the Little Bear, whose fondness for animals was a thorn in the sides of her teachers, proceeded to vent her spirits, raised to an unwonted pitch by the day’s adventures, by wildly caressing Fritz and Jerry, the pair of fine gray mules, the pride of Jake’s heart.

“I can’t help it,” cried the defiant Thistle, with her cheeks aglow. “It’s so hot in there, and Miss Benson said Margaret wasn’t wet or hurt enough to need attention, and too much knocked up to do anything useful; so we must wait out here. And that great, tall, handsome man has been down here again; he said he thought we might want him, and he made Verena, and Kate, and Margaret all drink some-

thing; and he showed us the loveliest sketch book, full of pictures of animals, and he said he wouldn't go until you came, and"—

This jumbled and characteristic speech of the Little Bear, who had a fashion of concealing great shrewdness under an appearance of almost infantine simplicity, served only to darken the cloud upon Miss Clive's brow.

"Gave you sketches to look at and made them drink something?" she began, her grave look deepening into a genuine frown as the "great, tall, handsome man" himself suddenly appeared from round the corner of the house, followed by his noble collie, and carrying his artist's paraphernalia with both hands.

"I ought to tell you," he said, bowing, "that on my way hither it suddenly struck me that I had forgotten to suggest that you should bring some restorative for the little girl, who is very weak; so I stopped at a farm-house and procured some brandy, which I took the liberty of administering at once—there was no time to lose. You may probably need me to lift her into the omnibus, or to go for a physician, so I shall remain out here and occupy myself, with your permission, by sketching these fine animals of yours—to compensate," he added, laughing, "for that other sketch I was beginning when Margaret summoned me."

"Thank you, sir," Miss Clive answered

shortly, "but I took care to bring with me whatever we might be likely to require," and she swept past him into the little dwelling, whither Miss Almira had quietly preceded her a few moments before, carrying the bundle of dry garments for the luckless pair of wounded heroines, who were discovered sitting in front of old Polly's stove, dismally wrapped in motley draperies, while their wet clothing was hung to dry on a line across the chimney-place. Kate, however, was in high spirits, somewhat dashed by anxiety about Verena, who, as Augustine had said, seemed utterly exhausted. Fanny was industriously trying to divert the invalids with the artist's sketch book, while Miss Benson and Miss Dorinda, sorely chagrined that an accident should have happened under their auspices, were pouring the accumulated vials of their wrath upon the head of Cornie, who hardly ceased to weep. Old Polly bustled about, full of voluble sympathy, insisting upon the whole party partaking of the hottest possible tea.

The "General," taking the command, instantly began scolding Cornie, who, in the intervals of the long and tedious process of getting the two girls into dry clothes, with due regard to their bruised condition and Verena's injured arm, had to listen to the worst lecture she had ever been known to receive upon the

subject of her headlong carelessness. Almira, far more gentle in her ministrations than Miss Clive, busied herself especially with the Hungarian, whose sufferings called forth all the poor Dragon's latent tenderness. The "General's" first act of authority was to snatch the sketch book from her pupil's hands and send it by Miss Benson to its owner, who, having seated himself upon his camp-stool in front of the mules, was proceeding to take their portraits, to Jake's unspeakable delight. Margaret, somewhat recovered, sat on the bench, caressing her cousin's beautiful dog, and Sophie Ursula, who had discreetly dodged out of sight, no sooner saw Miss Benson disappear than she stole quickly forward and stood beside the artist, watching every stroke.

"Won't you draw Jerry, that one to the right, by himself? He's the gentlest and the handsomest," she said; and Augustine, to gratify her, began the likeness as desired.

"Won't you draw *me*, as Titania, caressing Bottom?" next asked the Little Bear, who was not much troubled with bashfulness, as she approached her favorite, and, standing on tip-toe, began to pat and rub his long, solemn face. "Oh—just let me get on that stump, and we'll have our heads on a level, and you can draw us both,

“ ‘While I thine innocent cheeks do coy,
And stroke thy fair, large ears, my gentle
joy,’ ”

earnestly quoted Sophie, to the unspeakable amusement of her companions, while she fondled her long-eared pet, who, as she was in the daily habit of visiting and caressing him, remained perfectly motionless. “Wait till I lead him over to that stump and then you can begin. He’s only a mule, but he’ll do for Bottom. You needn’t mind my having such a short dress; fairies always wear ‘kirtles,’ you know. And you might ask Jake to get down from the box and stand for the rest of Nick Bottom, in a Grecian tunic, instead of his ugly nineteenth-century clothes. How I do wish the men now wore a dress like what they did in the seventeenth century, and flowing hair, instead of the horrid sandpaper style. I’m so glad you don’t wear yours as short as most gentlemen do now; I suppose it’s because you’re an artist and hate ugly things.”

Augustine and Margaret simultaneously burst out laughing, while the Little Bear gently guided the obedient mules to the desired spot, and mounted the stump, thereby bringing her own uncovered auburn head on a level with that of the animal. “Now, Mr. Livingstone, do please draw us—while I put my arms round his neck—so.”

“I shall ask leave, some day, to paint you and Margaret together,” said Augustine, highly amused. “It startled me when I first saw you with the others, when I had left Margaret over here a few minutes before, and I almost fancied she had given me the slip and rejoined them.”

“Oh, yes; there’s no end of fun with our being taken for each other. And, when she raced off, and wouldn’t mind orders to come back, Fanny Fox nodded at Kate and me and said, ‘A Gordon, a Gordon!’ No wonder that was enough for the war cry of the clan, for it signifies a great deal.”

“I knew better,” put in Margaret, “than to waste time in explaining to Miss Benson about my cousin being near at hand, for she would either have forbidden my going or would have insisted upon going with me, and a fine piece of work getting her up yonder would have been. It seemed better just to run away and take the consequences.”

“Does Miss Clive encourage you to read Shakespeare?” inquired Augustine, wondering whether the handsome head-teacher were as original a being as this specimen of her pupils, whose portrait he was busily drawing, while drawing out the communicative young lady likewise, to Margaret’s unconcealed delight.

“Oh, yes; in little bits, here and there; but I knew all about Nick Bottom, with his donkey’s



Bottom and Titania.

head, before I was five years old," said Sophie loftily. She took the bait, however, or pretended to take it, knowing well enough that this agreeable stranger wanted to hear about Miss Clive, and only too willing to gain her own point of keeping him in a good humor by gratifying his curiosity. "She brings us up on her own plan, half like a convent and half in the style of everything advanced and modern; and I think it's a most charming combination, Margaret, don't you?"

"Don't I?" said the young lady, as she stroked the dog's soft ears. "It results in most delightful scrapes, and dramatic performances, and I mean to edify Cousin Augustine with the history of the Martin's Hill affair, and a few more that he will appreciate, before long."

"I feel complimented by being worthy of such confidences," laughed the painter, while the Little Bear broke in, "Wait a minute, please, Mr. Livingstone, till I put some of those wild-flowers in my hair, for Titania, you know," and she took the round comb out of her streaming locks, smoothed them, replaced the comb and decorated her own head and that of the patient mule with white wild carrots and brilliant golden rod. "Oh, you needn't have the slightest scruple about sketching us. Miss Clive absolutely adores what is fanciful—she

sets us acting a play twice a year, and lets us be photographed in costume. I just wish you could see those twelve lovely groups, in cabinet size, all framed together, and one larger one by itself, which Mrs. Hill keeps hanging in her private parlor, as a memento of our delightful performance last June, when Margaret was a spectator and fell in love with our school. And we have so many prizes and badges of merit, like this medal of mine. Oh, it isn't for any sort of goodness, you know; that's not my line. I got it for skill in the cooking class, making soft gingerbread. Miss Clive says it is just ridiculous to teach girls all sorts of higher branches, and not the things we will have use for; so she started the cookery class, and you ought to see how half of the stupid ones—not that I'm stupid, except about arithmetic—who can't say a French verb right to save their lives, have taken to cooking and shine out as culinary geniuses at last. Fanny Fox—that small, dark handsome girl, who kept hanging round Verena—says that Miss Clive tries to govern us according to the French saying, '*La vanité se mêle dans tout.*' "

And here the Little Bear paused, out of breath.

"Particularly in your wishing me to draw you as the queen of the fairies?" said Augustine, unable to conceal his intense amusement.

The Little Bear gravely assented, and encouraged by his evident enjoyment, launched forth, assisted now and then by Margaret, into a lively, bold, saucy, yet on the whole correct description of her head-teacher's rule and its most salient peculiarities.

“And there's another thing, she hates persons who haven't any character. She says she'd rather have us too decided than too weak. Poor Mrs. Hill is always ailing, and Miss Clive just twists her round her little finger; but I should just like to see the person who would make *her* mind! And Kate Armstrong—the girl who got ducked with Verena—says that Miss Clive always reminds her of Tennyson's Princess.”

“Upon my word, she looked at me as if I were the Prince disguised, sneaking into her sacred precincts,” said Augustine, struck by the comparison. “She eyed me like her highness herself”—he stopped abruptly, catching the clear glance of his amused young cousin and the full gaze of Sophie's dark gray eyes, laughing as much as her merry lips, while the cottage door, suddenly opening, revealed Miss Clive's tall form upon the threshold.

Augustine jumped up, but the Little Bear stood her ground, on the stump, with her arms round the neck of the mule, whose flower-decked head remained immovable alongside of her own light, wreathed, streaming locks.

“Ursula”—Miss Clive began as usual; but her speech was cut short by Augustine’s sudden proffer of the newly finished sketch.

“You see I have taken rather more than was granted, not merely the likeness of your mule, but of your pupil,” he said jestingly, and would have added more, but Sophie Ursula interrupted:

“Are you going to give it to *her*? Oh, how mean!” and to Augustine’s surprise she flushed and looked ready to cry. The drawing was really very pretty, and Miss Clive at any other time would have been loud in its praise, but she merely said, loftily:

“This is no season for joking. Will you oblige me, Mr. Livingstone, by carrying my injured pupil to the omnibus?”

Augustine, rather mortified, though amused, quietly handed the sketch to Sophie, who seized it with a nod of triumph, accompanied by a breathless “Thank you, ever so much!” and, after proudly showing it to Margaret, thrust it, carefully rolled up, into the safe fastness of her deep pocket. Miss Clive, for once, seemed too preoccupied to notice them; and the general attention was presently absorbed by the sight of Verena, pale and drooping, her arm in a sling, as the painter gently bore her to the omnibus, amid a loud series of fervent expressions of sympathy from Jake. Kate followed

next, supported by Cornie and Fanny. The whole procession had rather a funereal aspect, very different from the one which Miss Clive had headed an hour before. Sophie Ursula, hat in hand, her hair still crowned with flowers, and Margaret, with garments sorely the worse for black stains of mud, slipped last into the omnibus, leading between them the dignified collie, perforce accompanying his master, who, laden with his many artistic belongings, escorted the ten more or less disconsolate wise and foolish virgins almost as a matter of course.

It was near sunset when the painter made his second appearance at Mount Cedar; the level rays were reddening the trunks of the trees and shining upon group after group of girls scattered about the lawn, eagerly watching for the omnibus as it came slowly up the winding road. Prominent among them was Madame Verrier, earnestly imploring them all to be "*très sage*" when the omnibus drew up before the door, for there was "*un monsieur la-dedans.*" Mrs. Hill stood upon the porch, ready to receive and thank this new hero, finding plenty to do in making Elisabeth Armstrong, at her side, understand that on no account was she to undertake to reprove or in any way annoy Kate because of the accident; neither must she presume to reproach poor Cornie, or to indulge in any more of her favorite speeches about the

Hungarian being always a center of disturbance. Julia & Co., afraid to risk their characters by any audible remarks which might jar upon the present highly wrought mood of the sympathizing public, took a hint from what they overheard addressed to Elisabeth, and prudently withdrew to a safe distance, where they exchanged characteristic comments.

Rose Gordon rushed forward, followed by Brownie, to be sternly repelled by Miss Clive, while Verena was borne by Augustine Livingstone up the steps and into the wide hall, where she fainted away as he laid her down upon the sofa, thereby redoubling the commotion and the chorus of lament. The stranger, thus unexpectedly introduced into the midst of this dovecote, had little opportunity for taking notes of its interior, for Miss Clive, bending in her large black straw hat and scarlet feather over her senseless pupil, whom Madame and Miss Almira were trying to revive, rather bluntly ordered him to carry her immediately to the infirmary at the top of the house, and, as the poor child took a long time to recover from her swoon, curtly accepted his offer of going for their regular physician, and dismissed him after brief thanks.

Mrs. Hill, far more courteous if less efficient than her imperious subordinate, overwhelmed him with heartfelt gratitude, insisting that he

should first be driven to the doctor's office in the town and then to his cousins' house. Some time later, in the twilight, Mrs. Livingstone, at Maple Grove, was astounded by seeing her husband's much-liked guest and cousin emerge, in solitary state save for his faithful dog, from a large omnibus, drawn by two fine and beautifully kept mules, whom he stopped to pat and caress with a heartiness that went far to confirm her well-regulated mind in her private conviction that this practical, soldierly, artist relative of theirs, whose visits were so charming, despite all his talents had always had something not very unlike a bee in his bonnet.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THISTLE-DOWN.

VERENA was drooping and shaken for several days; but her arm knit rapidly, and she often said that, but for the necessary suspension of gymnastics and all violent exercise, her injury was not such a very bad thing. She was petted by all her friends, waited upon by poor, contrite Cornie, who, with her keen remorse, seemed the chief sufferer, and had no copies, or themes to write, or music to practice, or sewing-lessons to do. Her wounded head had made it advisable to cut off her long, rippling hair, and she went about with short, curling, boyish locks that made Kate think her more than ever like some young hero in a poem, and brought out her dark, delicate beauty in a style that was striking and new.

No scars remained upon her forehead, and Kate declared that Verena always had luck, even in her misfortunes. For herself, she vowed that nothing ever would turn out in any way that was romantic or "like a book." It was better to have a broken arm and be a heroine for weeks than to undergo a horrid

sousing and fright—how dreadful it had seemed, just those few seconds under the water!—and have nothing to show for it but a set of ugly bruises which weren't even bad enough for her to be excused from her lessons for more than a single morning. Verena was highly important on the strength of her injuries, and Margaret occupied the position of second heroine because of her dogged exertions in going off after her cousin when so severely knocked and bruised by her tumble into the stone-strewn mud that she was lame and limping for many days.

So Kate, playing third to her two friends, wisely rejoiced that she was not in Cornie's place, getting blame and self-reproach. One lasting source of satisfaction from the adventure remained in the fact that Mr. Livingstone, on the pretext of accompanying his cousins, had paid several visits to the school. Verena's accident and her fortitude had increased the interest she had excited in Helen Livingstone, while Margaret's presence of mind had raised her many degrees in the estimation of her young relative, hitherto inclined to look down upon her as too childish. The artist had been so useful, and now contrived to make himself so agreeable, that Mrs. Hill soon granted his request to be allowed to make a sketch of Sophie Ursula and Margaret, represented, at their urgent desire, as bending their heads together

over his collie, whose beautiful countenance these young ladies pronounced to be the gem of the whole. The sittings took place in Mrs. Hill's private parlor, under her own eye or that of Madame Verrier, with occasional brief visits from Miss Clive, which soon excited the romantic imagination of some of her pupils to the utmost. Her semi-conventual mode of life for the scholars did not at all seem to have kept the idea of matchmaking out of their heads, and perhaps may have rather produced the opposite result.

Kate, while constantly professing indifference for love stories and love affairs in theory, and declaring that she knew she was intended for a "girl bachelor" of the most modern type, had quite settled in her own mind, and persuaded many Thistles likewise, that their beautiful young head-teacher must not spend her whole life at a boarding-school, but was bound to be, some day, wooed and won by some handsome hero like the artist, whom she therefore instantly, and as a matter of course, had fixed upon as the Coming Man as soon as she had seen him striding on, as she said, like a stork, being well aware, thanks to the novels she had read in the holidays and whenever she could get hold of them, that the conquering hero is sure to make his first appearance in the heart of an emergency. Not that they wanted to lose

Miss Clive, only their heads were full of the nonsense which grows so wildly and thrives but too luxuriantly in brains of fourteen or thereabouts; so that the remote possibility of a romance in her quarter had gained complete possession of their restless minds. Augustine Livingstone's very apparent admiration for the stately leader of the girls' march had not failed to impress many of the elder pupils, who lost no time in describing the whole to the heroines of the accident on their return. The ball being thus, as it were, set rolling, every trifle served to feed the flame. A speedy result of the sketching was that the Little Bear and Margaret were invited to lunch one Saturday at Maple Grove, in order to sit for the painting which was to be elaborated from the first draught, while Kate, Verena and Rose were asked to come over for the evening, with Mrs. Hill and Miss Clive. Mrs. Hill declined, but the "Princess," from motives which remained inscrutable, plunged a number of Thistles into the most ridiculous excitement by accompanying the girls.

And so the spare time after the early dinner on a mild, sunshiny Sunday found a bunch of Thistles gathered together in the garden, listening to Verena, who, her arm in a sling, but otherwise very full of health and spirits, was recounting the history of all that she and her

friends had seen, heard or surmised on that Saturday evening. It is superfluous to add that the chief attraction of this otherwise rather ponderous visit consisted in their having kept an Argus-eyed watch upon their handsome teacher and the artist. Nothing very striking had occurred, but the mere fact of Augustine having sat talking exclusively to Miss Clive for a great part of the evening was sufficient to set their minds into a flutter.

“He managed to find out the General’s Christian name, did he?” giggled Sophie Howard, in a quiver of delight.

“Yes; Helen Livingstone asked me to write my full name in her birthday book, and, of course, they were astounded at my having so many; all except little Edith, who said she thought it was delightful, and our artist friend heartily agreed with her. He said that there is hardly any civilized nation so full of common, ugly, undesirable names as this one, and that he wished some hideous ones, like Keziah, and Mehitabel, and Abigail, and so forth, could be forbidden by law. And our Princess, though she looked splendidly in that becoming garnet dress, braided with black like a Hungarian jacket, was evidently bored to death by Mrs. Livingstone, who kept discoursing upon education, and improving books, and seemed delighted when that ‘great, tall, handsome man,’

as the Bear calls him, turned the conversation upon names and asked what hers might be. Oh, it was such fun, just to sit and listen, in the intervals of having to talk to Helen, who is a very fine, intelligent girl, but terribly ponderous. The little one is worth a dozen of her, isn't she, Margaret?"

"Yes, indeed! She hasn't had to labor under the complex disadvantages of being an eldest child, with a painfully superior mother. Edith and Charlie take after their genial papa; but Helen is her mamma's own dignified daughter, whom I long to be able to take some of the starch out of. Edith and our little Rose, of course, hadn't the least idea how we were watching the Prince and Princess, and missed the fun."

"Such fun!" sighed Kate; "I felt so happy, just like a Carbonaro, or a conspirator, or somebody in a play, though it wasn't plots, or politics, or anything tragic; just the wish that those two might like each other."

"Our Sunflower was so happy and so busy listening that she hardly said a single word," went on Margaret. "It made me nervous to think how she was quietly absorbing everything that was uttered, and would be able to come out with it all, years hence, if she chose. And Verena's string of foreign-sounding names nearly knocked the breath out of Cousin Gertrude, for she thinks everybody ought to be

called after their grandparents, and that fancy names are rather improper."

"It's cruelty to animals to christen children by hideous names and make them suffer for life," said the Bear. "We were all asked to write ours in the birthday book, and my Ursula Sophia astonished them, especially as I put after it, 'usually called the Little Bear.' How the Prince did laugh and hint that I tried my best to live up to it."

"He drove back with you, didn't he?" asked Cornie.

"Oh, yes, indeed," began Verena; "he said it was better for ladies not to be driven at night *sans* gentlemen; so, as Jake did not seem a protector of very heroic mold, what must our Princess-General do but invite him to become our escort; and I know it was just what he wanted. He's quite at home now in our omnibus. You should have seen how we five sat on one side and let those two have the whole seat opposite—he at a respectful distance from her, and talking loud enough for us to hear every word. How we quizzed poor Rose, telling her to 'admire the charming prospect.' Of course we meant the prospect of the Prince losing his heart; but the simple child only turned round and sent us nearly into convulsions by staring out of the window into the dark."

"And," put in Kate, "when we got out, what

must he do but stop to pat the mules—he seems especially fond of those animals, like you, Bear—and I know he made it an excuse for lingering a moment to talk to the Princess before he set off on his solitary walk home—he says he loves to roam about the country at night—and”——

“You goosey,” began Fanny, “you don’t suppose he would be so absurd as to begin talking sentiment at the door of an omnibus with you all, and Jake, too, within hearing!”

“When Foxey speaks the other party always is a goose,” said Kate.

“Kate’s imagination is as wild on this subject as if she had lost her own heart, instead of giving away our General’s,” said Margaret. “It is all very exciting; but the best fun is to see what a series of electric shocks poor Helen undergoes when she comes here and sees Cornie, her own age and size, running about like a little girl, and climbing, and skipping rope. And Mrs. Hill, I know, intends to ask all my cousins here for the next theatricals by way of returning their hospitalities—and, if they come—oh, girls, it makes me shiver already to think of Cousin Gertrude’s criticisms—unless she should bring the Prince along. They like to have him there; it stirs them up.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TERRIBLE MISTAKE.

IT was a mild, moonlight evening in October. Nearly all the girls had gathered in the long parlor, about to begin their usual Saturday's amusement of acting charades or having tableaux in the large curtained recess at the upper end of the room, which did duty for a theater on ordinary occasions. A party had been sent by Madame to fetch the theatrical wardrobe, and they were busily diving into certain well-stuffed drawers and closets in a small upstairs room at one end of a gallery, when Verena's quick ear caught the sound of a man's footsteps advancing along the flag-paved walk. Dropping everything, an eager group clustered round the open window.

"It's the Prince, girls; there's no mistaking that height or that military stride," excitedly whispered Kate, jumping back as she recognized the new hero of Mount Cedar. "He's come for an evening visit!"

"In that case, we won't get any of the fun, for he hasn't brought Helen with him, to give us an excuse for going into Mrs. Hill's parlor,"

said Margaret. "I tried to get her here by suggesting a Saturday evening visit, when she would share our tableaux—but he's all alone."

"Look," said Verena, "he's reconnoitering the premises—what can he be after? There he goes, round the corner of the house. Let us run down at once and meet him accidentally as he comes in!"

"Hark!" said Fanny, "do you hear that?"

A few flute notes rose upon the still autumn evening air, low, but sweet, and evidently drawn forth by a player of no mean skill.

"It's a serenade!" cried Kate, in an ecstasy. "Oh, girls, this is better than a visit! Let us go round to that other gallery window and listen."

"What about those stage dresses?" asked the practical Cornie. "Madame will be sending some one to look after us if we don't appear soon."

"Then be high-minded and self-sacrificing for once, and carry them down for us in your fine, strong arms," said Fanny; and the good-natured Cornie accepted the errand, though not without some laughing protest.

The others, a moment after, had ensconced themselves, half out of sight, at the gallery window, heroically struggling to repress the peals of laughter which the delightful fact of the painter having come to serenade their beautiful teacher naturally called forth.

"He has chosen the wrong side of the house, for the Princess is in her own room this evening," whispered Margaret.

"Oh, well, you had better avail yourself of your relationship to go and tell him," laughed Fanny, "or get the lady to change her quarters."

The prelude on the flute was ended, and the soft, melancholy strains of a well-known piece of music were caught by the listening group.

"Beethoven's *Adelaide*!" exclaimed Verena at once. "Hurrah! this was what he was after, wanting to find out her name!"

"Hush!" protested Margaret, as the flute-playing stopped. "He's going to sing it, I know. He sings delightfully."

Augustine did begin to sing it, in German, with a rich, mellow, baritone voice that brought the quiet tears to Kate's eyes. The rest were divided between ecstasies of laughter and enjoyment of the music; while Fanny went on, "What a wonder they don't hear him in the parlor, but there's always such a din! Where can his *Adelaide* be? How much she is losing!"

"I mean to find out whether she knows he is there, for it is getting too much to be borne," said Margaret, as, not without an effort, for she longed to stay and listen, she darted off.

Sophie Ursula, unable to keep quiet and less captivated by the music, soon declared that she,

too, must go and see why nobody seemed to hear it but themselves. Margaret was already out of reach, and the gallery, seldom visited at this hour, was as yet lighted only by the moon. As usually happens when "corporation moonlight" has to be depended upon, the luminary that was in duty bound to cheer that portion of the dwelling now grew capricious and dipped behind a cloud. The Little Bear, determined that their friend must not have all his trouble for nothing, plunged boldly on, encouraged beyond her utmost hopes by dimly catching sight of a tall female figure advancing towards her, and (evidently hearing the singing, rising sweet and strong on the still night air) quickly approaching another window that likewise commanded the walk.

"Oh, Miss Clive, Miss Clive, I want to speak to you!" cried Sophie at the top of her voice as she scudded after her, only anxious to detain her long enough to ensure her looking out and catching a glimpse of the serenader. "Please wait a moment! Please do look out of that window!"

The tall figure quickened her steps.

"Miss Clive!" shouted Sophie Ursula again, doubly eager to detain her and let the adoring musician become aware that his "Adelaide" was now within sight of his no-doubt uplifted eyes as, in obedience to the loud and repeated

summons, she approached the window and looked out.

Fanny, Verena and Kate, gazing from their own well-chosen post of observation, at right angles to the other window, though at some distance, beheld the tall, dark-haired figure lean over the sill for a moment, glance rapidly down the dusky garden, shake her head as though in grave disapprobation, and, to their unutterable dismay, close first the shutters and then the sash, with a vigorous and resounding bang which smote upon their souls.

“She has sent him off!” they whispered to each other; and the painter was evidently of the same opinion, for he ceased abruptly, not even finishing the last stanza of the song. The three girls, dismayed and wondering, looked after his retreating form without a word. The doleful silence was first broken by the panic-stricken Sophie Ursula, who came rushing to meet them as they quitted their hiding-place.

“He’s gone; and it wasn’t she herself, after all!” was her incoherent explanation, which, growing clearer as it proceeded, revealed to the astounded Thistles (now rejoined by Margaret, with the unwelcome news that the Princess was in bed with an unwonted affliction of a bad headache) that the tall woman who had virtually given poor Augustine his dismissal was no other than Elisabeth Armstrong, who, sublimely

unconscious of the little drama which was beginning to be played, had undertaken to over-act her self-imposed rôle of a mentor and guardian of the school. Hearing the music, and fancying that it must be from some rustic swain who chose to spend his Saturday evening by improperly sneaking into the grounds of Mount Cedar for the purpose of giving a serenade to some kitchen sweetheart, Queen Bess felt naturally inclined to nip his intended impropriety in the bud.

Augustine, beholding her leaning out into the hazy moonlight, and hearing Miss Clive's name repeatedly shouted by the Little Bear so loudly that it pierced his ears through all his music, had not unreasonably supposed the tall, commanding, dark-haired figure to belong to the object of his admiration, especially as Elisabeth, who was to leave in a few days, had exchanged her school uniform for a dress not unlike that worn by her young teacher, besides twisting up her long locks into a mass of braids such as adorned the stately head of Miss Clive. All of which, briefly related by the despondent and yet half-laughing Bear to the disconsolate quartette, produced a sensation to be imagined.

"He'll come back, if he has any sense," said Fanny. "He'll try again."

"He ought to be told how it was all a stupid blunder," groaned Kate. "Couldn't we send him an anonymous postal card"——

“Yes; for all the world to read,” laughed Fanny, with copious suggestions as to how it might be worded, and in some foreign language, for the sake of propriety; whereat the others laughed, and Kate declared that agitation appeared to be unsettling her powers of mind. But the laugh helped to lighten their spirits, and they deemed it wise to descend to the parlor, where Cornie had been at some trouble to account to Madame for their prolonged absence. Margaret felt so provoked that she almost resolved to acquaint her cousin with the true state of things; but her usual daring failed her in view of the delicate nature of the subject; and when they next saw Helen Livingstone, a few days after, they heard how the painter had suddenly cut short his visit, in spite of their entreaties to stay longer, and had gone back to his studio in New York.

Kate, after much deliberation and great misgivings, nerved herself to ask Elisabeth, as a parting act of duty, to tell Miss Clive about the unfortunate blunder before she left school. Elisabeth, after some demurring and a most unpleasant amount of moralizing to her sister upon the absurdity of a girl of her age presuming to think or care about love affairs for her teachers, or anybody, consented; but the interview was private, and “Queen Bess” flatly declined to enlighten Kate as to what had taken

place, to her unspeakable wrath and disappointment.

Miss Clive, of course, never alluded to the matter; but the tidings of the luckless serenade (which had been heard by the entire population of the kitchen regions) gradually got noised abroad among the scholars, and served to invest the "General" with a fresh interest that proved invaluable just then, as she herself was for some time remarked for an additional sternness of manner, with a more than usual fondness for putting the Thistles, or, indeed, any culprits, under what Kate chose to term "martial law." Compassionately settling among themselves that she was naturally vexed and distressed by the apparently capricious departure of her admirer, it is satisfactory to be able to say that the Thistles for some time took rather more pains than formerly to avoid causing her unnecessary worry, even trying, now and then, to restrain the wild spirits of the younger girls.

Verena declared, with a touch of her innate Magyar melancholy and superstition, that Augustine's choice of Beethoven's "Adelaide" for a serenade was unlucky. "It struck me, girls, with a sort of feeling as if it meant misfortune, when I heard him begin! You know that the real Adelaide was a German lady of rank, whose papa wouldn't let her marry the humble young poet, who was only a *Hauslehrer*—a

domestic tutor—and became a country pastor, and married some one else, and was famed for his pathetic poetry. And Adelaide became a canoness, and never married at all, though Lutheran canonesses are free to marry if they choose. And, when she was quite an old woman, a festival was arranged at the canonesses' house, and some enthusiastic musician performed this piece of music in her especial honor"——

"Oh!" broke in Kate, with tears in her eyes, "and she had to sit and listen to it, and endure the associations, and remember everything?"

"Yes; don't you all know how, when a set of romantic Germans get going, they do all kinds of things which it never would enter the Anglo-Saxon mind—more especially the American—to conceive of?"

"Don't I know?" exclaimed the traveled Margaret. "No wonder that, when he began singing, you took it as a bad omen; though there's no social disparity in this case, and no papa, and no canonesses for our Princess to join. There's no possible objection, for Cousin Augustine has a good patrimony and is getting on well as an artist. If they don't end by making a match, it will only be their own fault."

So their promised romance seemed to be unkindly nipped by Fate in the bud; and the disappointed Thistles were obliged perforce to

content themselves with the ordinary round of school interests, varied, as hitherto, by that plentiful sprinkling of mild foolishness which the Little Bear chose to designate by the German "*Eselei*," or "Donkeyishness," because it seemed as though assumed with the intention of causing all beholders to place the perpetrators thereof upon an intellectual level with the long-eared objects of her constant love.

CHAPTER XXV.

MISCHIEF.

BUT, as usual, the slight improvement in the Thistles' conduct was not destined to continue very long.

“Something is wrong!” exclaimed Miss Clive, one evening in November, suddenly rising from her seat in the long parlor. “One after another has slipped away. Frances Fox—Margaret Gordon—Katharine Armstrong—Verena Forster—none of them here! I do not believe that study is at the bottom of it.”

And, sweeping out of the parlor with her usual swift, majestic pace, the “General” proceeded to the schoolroom, where a small knot of pupils were studying, but none of those she sought. Gaining no news of the missing, she started upon a search through the lower story, where several class-rooms and music-rooms opened into the hall. Eager but uneasy voices were talking in low tones from behind a closed door.

“Give her ice water, girls, and she’ll come out of it.”

“Take a piece of ice and rub her forehead.”

“Open that window, some of you. Shake her. Try to move her.”

“Nonsense!” Fanny protested in her decided way, “you can’t do any good. Stay here and try to keep quiet, while I go and look for Verena. She brought her into this condition and she must get her out of it.”

Hurriedly opening the door, Fanny recoiled at sight of her teacher, but Miss Clive’s angry questioning was cut short by the sight which met her eyes.

Leaning back in a chair sat Julia Maxwell, her face rigid, her eyes fixed, but half open, and without a sign of consciousness. Heavily breathing, yet without moving a limb, she seemed as if spellbound, resisting the united efforts of half a dozen girls to arouse her.

Miss Clive, in answer to her inquiries, heard that, conversation among Kate’s set having turned upon mesmerism, hypnotism and such unwholesome subjects, several of the wildest had jestingly proposed trying to hypnotize each other. Verena, to whom Fanny, as she now acknowledged, had said she looked as if she might prove to be a medium, soon offered to try her skill upon anyone willing to venture. Kate, of course, had volunteered to be the first subject, followed by Fanny, Cornie, Margaret and Sophie Ursula, who all, however, when questioned, declared that they had not felt anything

beyond a slight nervous tremor in the eyelids and forehead, probably caused by the near approach and repeated movements of the would-be hypnotizer's hands.

Here matters would probably have rested had not Julia Maxwell, Cecilia Morgan and some of their associates happened to enter the classroom into which the party had slipped away from the parlor, and, professing great interest in the subject, insisted that Verena should try her skill upon them. Cecilia's experience proved as unsuccessful as that of her predecessors; but Julia, who had declared, laughing, that she was certain no one could ever hypnotize her, had in a few moments been reduced to this state of apparent unconsciousness. Just as the girls were expecting to see her awake, Verena, hitherto self-possessed and smiling, had suddenly shown signs of great nervous excitement. She stopped short in her movements, raised her hands, fluttering the finger-tips with a spasmodic motion that seemed to quiver through her whole slight frame, and drawing in her breath with a sort of shiver, ending in a clenching of her teeth, as if struggling violently for self-control. Her friends gathered round her in alarm, but she did not recognize them, and, before they could stop her, had, with another violent and convulsive shiver and a low, wild, horror-stricken cry, turned away from them and darted from the room.

The girls, thinking that she would return, had tried to make light of the situation until their attempts at mirth were changed to alarm at Verena's prolonged absence and the apparent impossibility of restoring Julia from her trance, even after Miss Clive's vigorous efforts to arouse her had been added to theirs. Cecilia, meanwhile, assisted by others of her own set (the "Nettles" of unenviable fame), kept hinting that she feared some sudden impulse or spite might have inspired Verena's conduct; while the Thistles, headed by Kate, Fanny and Cornie, who, when excited, was no mean orator upon practical subjects, indignantly declared their Hungarian friend to be incapable of such meanness, and that her sudden flight must be owing to some failure of nervous power in herself.

Margaret Gordon and Sophie Ursula quietly slipped out, behind the "General's" back, in order to beg Madame Verrier to go to the scene of action; after which they hurriedly departed on a bootless search for Verena through the upper stories. Kate, stammering with excitement, tried to deprecate Miss Clive's wrath by beginning a wild but truthful narrative of sundry evil-minded doings of Julia's, which Cecilia, of course, was ready either to defend or to deny. Fanny was silent, knowing well that the only way to diminish her teacher's irritation was to

let it vent itself in talk. Madame now entered and, loudly exclaiming, proceeded to ply Julia with various restoratives, which had no effect. Cecilia and her friends were sent back to the parlor, as they only made matters worse, while Fanny quietly arose and approached the door.

“Where are you going?” sharply asked Miss Clive, looking up from where she sat beside Julia, rubbing her hands and forehead.

“To find Verena,” calmly answered Fanny, looking straight into her teacher’s eyes. “Don’t you know that whoever brought Julia into this condition is the only one who can get her out of it?”

“I will go with you, Frances, for not one of you is to be trusted!” muttered Miss Clive, as, commending the motionless Julia to the care of Madame, she rose abruptly and, seizing Fanny’s arm, left the room.

Cornie, Kate, Margaret and the Little Bear, with the rest of the uneasy Thistles, had just taken refuge in the school-room at their desks, from the shelter of which inviolable fortresses they stoutly denied all knowledge of Verena’s whereabouts.

“Very well!” said Miss Clive harshly, “say what you choose. You are all in the same fix, remember, every one of you who joined in this most foolish affair to-night. You shall not feel much inclined to play with such edged tools very soon again, I can promise you.”

Cornie kept her eyes upon the French verbs she was well known never to be able to remember for five minutes together; Kate dared not move a muscle; Sophie Howard, not at all disposed to giggle, sat bending over a history with both hands pressed to her forehead; Margaret would not look up; and the Little Bear, who had sought refuge at Verena's unoccupied desk, next to Kate, had made a wild plunge into the study most hateful to her by burying herself in the depths of "Pike's Arithmetic." Even Fanny, still the prisoner of her teacher's firm grasp, did not try to smile at her companions in misfortune as Miss Clive, after firing sundry parting shots at the delinquents, slowly stepped out of the room.

"Frances," she began, as they crossed the hall, "you cannot deceive me any longer. You are in some plot with that wretched child to make trouble. Do not deny it any more. From Verena Forster I have never expected much satisfaction. But from you, who have been at this establishment for upwards of five years—you, who will soon be sixteen years old, and should be outgrowing childish tricks—who are, indeed, quite old enough to be confirmed and set an example to your classmates—I had hoped for something better. I see how it is. You wish to accompany me on a pretended search for Verena, in order

to lead me off on a wrong track and give time for some more diabolical mischief to begin."

"Miss Clive!" Fanny answered with dignity, forcibly withdrawing her arm, standing still, and looking, as before, straight into her teacher's angry eyes. "You have a right to blame me for joining in this as much as those others, but no more. Where Verena may be at this moment is as unknown to me as it is to you. Blame us all as you will; but do us justice. I shall wait in the parlor, in Mrs. Hill's presence, until she is found.

And without giving the "General" time to recover from her surprise, Fanny turned and walked away towards the parlor door.

Miss Clive, thoroughly disgusted with herself and her pupils (and who knows but that part of her irritability may have been caused by the recent sad blunder concerning Mr. Livingstone), did not care to follow, but bent her steps upon a solitary search, in which poor Dorinda was soon summoned to assist, which aid, as usual, consisted chiefly in serving as a vent for her superior's wrath. Meanwhile the would-be hypnotized were whispering in the school-room over their books.

"Brownie and Rose Gordon aren't in it," said Sophie Howard. "That's one comfort; we can't be blamed for leading the youngsters into tricks. And Julia's being served right for her hateful

ways; so, whether we're punished or not, it's worth it—if only Verena turns up all safe."

"Yes," said Kate, "if it only doesn't turn out that poor Verena is the hypnotized person whom Julia has been fooling with a pretended going off into a trance. She's a deep, crooked one—how do we know but that her wish to be hypnotized wasn't all a plan to get us well scared and Verena into hot water? I suspected her when she came in, professing to be so interested—and more still when she seemed to go off so fast all at once."

"You've grown uncommonly sharp and suspicious of late," murmured Cornie. "You always used to be wanting to believe in everybody until Verena got hold of you; and now you're as keen-sighted as Foxey herself."

"I can't help learning to see things," said Kate, pleased to find herself outgrowing her childish reputation for simplicity. "Julia is a snake, and I don't trust her."

"Perhaps it was all a trick between her and Verena to scare us," boldly suggested the Little Bear, taking her arithmetic book and venting her spite against it by a series of angry tosses in the air.

"No!" exclaimed Kate, indignantly. "Verena's wild enough; but she never would join with Julia for such a wretched, mean trick as that."

“Hem! Ahem!” significantly grunted the Bear, with a meaning glance at Margaret and an equally meaning shake of her tawny mane in the direction of Kate. “I shall be fourteen early in January, and Verena and Kate will be fifteen—and Margaret, too—so it’s getting time for us to have some sense, though it doesn’t seem to develop quite in the General’s line. I don’t want to grow any older; I hate ‘womanly girls,’ who are stiff, and mature, and want to be like young ladies several years too soon. I get fearfully bored, just as you do, Margaret, when Helen comes here, and we’re expected to sit still, and converse about lessons, and improving books, with one or two of our commanders looking on. I detest stiff, drawing-room company; I like somebody who wants to run about in the garden and gymnasium—Helen can’t learn how to swing on the rings to save her life!—and be like one of ourselves. I do hate all kinds of heavy, made-up conversation for the sake of entertaining people.”

“So do I!” broke in Margaret. “I’m happier almost anywhere than in a parlor. I like libraries, or studios, or quiet sitting-rooms where we can occupy ourselves in some congenial way without being observed.”

“Yes,” continued the Bear. “I’m happier anywhere than in a parlor, except, of course, a dentist’s chair or the school-room when

arithmetic is going on. That's the 'time that tries my soul.' "

"The Bear mayn't shine in arithmetic," said Kate, "but Foxey says she can go ahead fast enough in anything else, if she chooses to try."

"Compliments are worth double from that quarter," laughed Sophie Ursula. "Oh, Margaret, you should have been here last winter, when I suggested to some Thistles that we should lay our prickly heads together and concoct a charming letter, to hoax the editor of that juvenile magazine which Mrs. Hill takes for us. We pretended to be some little girls from a farm in Pennsylvania, who wanted information about 'the best Boarding Skool' in New England, where the 'skollers' took turns to do the housework as a cheap way of getting an education. We spelt it in delightfully phonetic English, full of simple questions about the 'skool,' and begged them to recommend us some book of poetry, because our Aunt Keziah, or somebody, didn't approve of our reading 'novvils.' Oh, such fun!"

"And you really sent it?" put in Margaret. "Why wasn't I here?"

"Of course we sent it—and we did hoax that editor gloriously; for he swallowed it, every word, and devoted nearly half a column in the 'Answers to Correspondents' to a reply, and called us 'dear little girls,' and recommended

some goody-goody book of selections in verse. And, oh! wouldn't they have felt ready to murder us if they could have seen how we managed to get the next number, when it arrived, and rushed off to the gymnasium to look for our answer, and found it, and laughed till we rolled on the floor."

Miss Almira, her day's work ended, was sitting in her small sanctum upon the ground floor, writing to her sister, when she was suddenly startled by the quick opening of the door and the sound of footsteps behind her chair. Glancing round, half-suspecting some trick, she beheld the small, thin form of the Hungarian, looking boy-like with her short black locks parted at one side, and curling all over her head—staggering forward, both hands extended, till she leaned against the table for support.

"What is the matter, dear child?" asked the Dragon in a soft tone, for Verena's strange conduct and foreign looks led Almira, who had a strong vein of idealism in the depths of her sorely-repressed nature, to consider her as a being to be differently judged from the others.

There was no answer, but the child, breathing heavily, slowly raised herself from her leaning posture, gasped, pressed one hand to her heart, and, trying to reach the sofa, sank beside it on

her knees. Miss Almira, thoroughly alarmed, ran to Verena, lifted her upon the lounge, and fearing that she was going to faint, opened another door and called two of the maids from the kitchen, hard by. Verena murmured something unintelligible, while Almira and the women gave her water and bathed her forehead.

“Who has been teasing you?” she asked, in astonished anxiety, as the girl, though quite conscious, lay still, with half-closed eyes. Almira seated herself beside her, softly passing her fingers over the dark clustering curls, carefully observing the fine smoothness of the olive-tinted skin, the clear-cut features and exquisitely molded mouth. This orphan child from a far-off country seemed the embodiment of all those vague dreams of “something rich and strange” which had haunted the plain, hard-worked teacher through her many years of struggling life. As she bent above the Hungarian girl, soothing her with quiet sympathy shown less by words than gestures, Almira felt more than ever weighed down beneath the endless, hopeless burden of her own painful, commonplace, unimportant existence—face to face with this flower of brilliant youth. If she could have been like this—and she checked the thought as sinful, sure that it would be condemned by her friends at the Methodist chapel which she

had joined in her longing for more emotion than could be found in the hard Calvinism of her early life. Yet if Providence—but here her mind underwent a fresh shock as the door leading to the hall suddenly opened and Miss Clive, followed by Dorinda, entered in most stately wrath, leaving the door wide open, as if to show her determination to assert herself and discover what might be going on inside.

“So!” she began dryly, surveying the group by the sofa, where Verena still lay without speaking. “A precious piece of work, Verena Forster, you have made to-night! And you, Almira, are petting her, and encouraging her in her horrid tricks, are you?”

“I know nothing about her tricks,” Almira replied shortly. “I was here, supposing that you had the school-room in charge, when this child burst in and sank down in the state you see her in now. She could not even tell me what had happened. Of course I supposed some one had been frightening her.”

“It is she who has been frightening other people,” said Miss Clive, trying to hold back Dorinda, who had knelt down to examine Verena’s face. “What must she do, in her abominable malice, but hypnotize Julia Maxwell, and, as soon as she had made her unconscious, what must she do but run away and leave her lying there. Let her alone, Almira;

she's just what your church people call a limb of Satan," wound up the excited head-teacher, completely overmastered by her wrath.

"Limb of Satan or not, she's a poor, nervous, shattered orphan child, who has been hardly used somewhere, or somehow," exclaimed Almira in turn, her sympathies fully roused. "I don't know, or care, what she's been doing out there with you! I only know that I mean to give her the help she seemed to need when she staggered in at this door."

"Help or not," returned Miss Clive, "you must make her get back to where that other girl is lying, in a state far worse than this. You had better reserve some of your pity for *her*!"

Almira, by degrees comprehending the situation, bestirred herself by plying Verena with restoratives until she was able to sit up. Miss Clive, scolding and helping, brought a glass of brandy and water, which she held to her pupil's lips, commanding her, in no gentle voice, to swallow it at once. Verena languidly sipped a few drops; then, in mingled anger, disgust and a certain delirious weakness, turned aside her head, and, striking the glass, contrived to dash it upon the floor.

"Her head is confused; she hardly knows what we mean," protested Almira; while the maids gathered up the broken glass.

"She'll soon find out what I mean," said Miss

Clive, standing erect and angrily quivering the fingers of each hand hanging by her side. "Go back into that room she shall and try to undo her vile mischief, even if Jake and Sandy have to carry her there on that sofa."

Almira, without a word, rose from her seat by the girl, whom she gently and quickly raised in her strong arms and stood holding, ready to go.

"Show the way," she said calmly. "I will carry her."

Miss Clive frowned, but silently left the room, and headed the procession, whose rear was brought up by Dorinda and the two maids, till they reached the class-room, where Madame still kept an anxious watch over Julia, apparently as unconscious as before.

"There!" said Miss Clive, pointing to Julia. "See what your malice and wickedness has done! See whether you are able to undo it."

Verena, whose sudden weakness, the result of her rash and ignorant expenditure of nervous energy in trying, however unsuccessfully, to hypnotize several girls, had come upon her, together with a certain mental confusion, when she rushed away with no definite intention save of hiding herself until recovered, lay still, with closed eyes, upon the shoulder of Miss Almira, who gently slid her down upon the floor, supporting her with both hands.

“Elle est trop faible, pauvre petite!” murmured Madame, eyeing Verena compassionately as she, with some difficulty, stood upright and, supported by Almira and Dorinda, and by degrees comprehending what was wanted, tried to “reverse the passes” with unsteady fingers, though for some minutes entirely without success.

“Wretched failure!” growled Miss Clive. “I shall send for the doctor.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

UNEXPECTED VARIETIES.

MEANWHILE Kate and Margaret, who had finished their studies and found the stillness of the school-room unendurable, resolved, in the absence of all teachers (some of whom had gone to spend this Friday evening with friends in the town), to start on a private search for Verena in sundry nooks and corners hitherto unexplored. The Little Bear, still puzzling over her sums, could not accompany them; the other Thistles were occupied, and their presence might only have complicated matters further. Quietly slipping out, afraid to venture near the class-room to which the Hungarian had just been carried, they looked into every other small room on that floor, passed through the "Dragon's Den," still bearing traces of some commotion, and ran into the kitchen, then occupied only by the colored cook and old Jake.

The latter, thankful for Sandy's temporary absence, sat slowly endeavoring to read a tract to his ally, the cook. Coming, as usual, to a halt at every fourth word, his eyes brightened

at seeing "Miss Katie," who did not, however, offer to read to him, but dashed his hopes by asking him and the cook to join in searching their premises, nearly all of which had been examined when the girls and their assistants paused beside a closed pantry door.

"Don't go in, Missies," said the cook. "De Ghost lives in it."

"Does he?" cried Margaret, delighted. "I didn't know we had one here. How charming! What does he do?"

"Rattles in de tin pans at night," solemnly answered the woman, while Kate, bursting with laughter at her words and Jake's frightened face, exclaimed, "All the more fun!" and Margaret, despite the old cook's entreaties, snatched the candle from her hand and opened the door.

The light displayed at first only a large store-room, filled with various articles in constant use. Margaret, valiantly inclined to search the whole place, less in hopes of finding Verena than from a love of adventure, lifted the candle as high as possible, while they peeped behind the numerous barrels and boxes. Suddenly Kate uttered a slight scream, and Margaret, turning round, almost dropped her candle as its flickering light fell upon a dark figure slowly rising from behind a flour barrel in the corner farthest from the door.

It was not Verena, but a thick-set, disreputa-

ble though quite sober-looking man, who, finding himself about to be discovered, saw fit to confront the two girls with a very bulldog-like, unpleasant face.

“What are you doing here?” asked Margaret, trembling, but restrained from instant flight by the comforting sense of the nearness of her two colored allies and a vision of the shame of cowardice and of the glory to be won among teachers and scholars by braving the robber, if such he were, with an undaunted countenance.

“I wants a night’s lodgin’,” growled the stranger sulkily. “I ain’t a-goin’ for to steal or to hurt ye’s. I wants somethin’ for to eat.”

Jake and the cook, hearing a human voice proceeding, as they doubtless supposed, from the ghost, uttered loud exclamations, redoubled when Kate dashed out, almost into the cook’s fat arms; while Margaret, still grasping the candle, quickly followed. Breath for explanations almost failed them at first, but the emergency was sufficiently understood for Jake to bang the pantry door tight and turn the key.

“Is there a window? Can he get out any other way?” gasped the girls as they sank upon chairs, feeling rather more frightened than at first.

“No, Miss Katie,” said the cook, “nuthin’ but a tiny winder a-lookin’ into de hall. He’s cotched safe enuf, praise de Lord!”

“Jake!” panted Margaret, as he took the candle from her shaking hand, “call Sandy—tell Miss Almira—get somebody else here, quick!”

Jake’s reluctance to leave lest the intruder should break loose was cut short by the opportune arrival of Sandy, who marched in with a bevy of two or three rival sweethearts, all highly excited by the news and by the young ladies’ startled looks. Sandy, declaring that the man, for aught they knew, might be in league with others to break into the house, posted himself, armed with his pistol and a stout stick, at the pantry door, ready to secure the prisoner should he attempt to escape. Kate and Margaret, somewhat recovered and eager to be the first to carry the news of this unpleasant novelty to the authorities of Mount Cedar, left the now well-garrisoned kitchen and hastened back to the room where the hypnotizing had taken place. Fanny, whose first anger at her teacher’s unjust accusation had passed into active desire to expedite matters for the benefit of all concerned, had gone to Mrs. Hill and privately informed her of the whole, confessing her own share and asserting that the unlucky experiment had arisen from her own suggestion. Sorely distressed, but more inclined to blame Verena than Fanny, Mrs. Hill, after placing a senior pupil in charge of the parlor, hurried to

the room where the Hungarian, having made another unsuccessful effort to awaken Julia, was being ruthlessly and uninterruptedly lectured by Miss Clive.

“Verena,” said Mrs. Hill, earnestly, “is the first use that you make of your arm that was broken to be this?”

Verena, thoroughly exhausted, made no answer, but burst into tears, still sitting between Dorinda and Miss Almira, while Miss Clive, hanging over Julia, began a fresh reproof, which was cut short by the sudden entrance of Margaret and Kate. Rushing in like a whirlwind, they shrieked wildly to poor Mrs. Hill, one on each side:

“There’s a robber in the house—shut up in the kitchen pantry—we both saw him—Sandy’s with a pistol at the door”——

“Silence!” commanded Miss Clive, shaking Kate roughly by the arm. “Do you expect to make a diversion by a silly new trick like this?”

“It’s no trick. He’s *there!*” protested Margaret. “Ask them in the kitchen. We saw him among the barrels. Mrs. Hill, it’s all true!”

The alarm had been heard in the parlor, whence now issued a troop of eager, curious, nervous, or giggling girls. Fanny Fox dashed forward.

“Kate and Margaret always tell the truth. Let me try to help Julia while Miss Clive goes

to find out," she besought of Mrs. Hill; but no pleading was necessary, for the General, sublimely indignant at this new interruption, and inclined to suspect the whole race of school-girls, had marched out, followed by Miss Almira, leaving the two invalids in Mrs. Hill's and Madame Verrier's charge. Margaret and Kate, beginning to feel more agitated than they had done at sight of the stranger, implored and finally obtained leave to accompany their teachers to the scene of fresh disturbance, and, with Fanny between them, slowly traversed the hall, agreeably conscious of the half-wondering, half-admiring looks bestowed upon them by the other girls, who vainly asked permission to follow.

Miss Clive, when overtaken by the pair, stood holding a dispute with Miss Almira in front of the door guarded by Sandy, whom the "General" wished to enter the pantry and capture the intruder. Almira prudently suggested that it might be better to keep him there, locked up, while Jake should go for the police at once; whereat Miss Clive, angry at everybody, amid a great deal of grumbling from the excited servants, whom, with Kate and Margaret, she roundly accused of having only fancied that there was any man there at all, called for a short step-ladder, and, candle in hand, mounted to take a survey of the interior of the pantry

through the small window looking into the passage. A faint light from the kitchen shone through a large open ventilator on top of the pantry door and dimly illuminated the crowded interior. The girls, almost afraid lest the man might have somehow escaped or hidden so as to deprive them of the fame of having found him, had hard work to repress a smile as they saw Miss Clive look in, start, exclaim and descend with a jerk nearly ending in a tumble, while she curtly ordered Jake to get out the cart and go for the police at once.

“Ah!” Miss Almira could not help saying, “so you saw him, too?”

“Almira Quackenbos!” retorted the irate head-teacher, turning round and still more angry at the sight of Margaret’s laughing eyes and Kate’s amused face. “Remember that you are the housekeeper of this establishment, and, if any knavery or carelessness among the servants has enabled rogues to sneak into the house, the responsibility must rest upon you.”

Almira, feeling that she could afford to let Miss Clive vent her useless irritation, made no reply, but accompanied her grinning pupils back to the class-room. Verena reclined drowsily in an arm-chair, but Julia appeared much better, able to go slowly up to bed, supported by Mrs. Hill and Miss Clive, who peremptorily ordered Almira and Dorinda to help Verena to reach

the dormitory and undress. Kate and Margaret, much relieved, went with Fanny into the parlor, where they instantly became the center of an eager crowd.

"Such fun!" was Cornie's verdict upon the evening's adventures. "Trying to be hypnotized and seeing Julia take on so (if it wasn't all a sham), and finding a real, live robber in the house. Girls, how I envy you for being the ones to find him. Madame has been praising your courage in not being more frightened and saying how much we all owe to you."

"Oh!" cried Margaret, "he did not even offer to attack us, and if he had he would soon have been overpowered by stout old Susan and our lean but wiry Jake. He didn't come within ten feet of us. However, if we can be heroines for something virtuous, let us make the most of it!"

Kate, though beginning to feel terribly exhausted, was, in other respects, perfectly happy, surrounded by a chorus of exclamations of terror at the thought of the robber and praises of herself and Margaret, who almost wished that their nerve might have been more severely tried for the sake of the renown sure to follow. Rose Gordon and a troop of the most excitable rushed to watch from the windows for the arrival of the police, who came in due time, and took the man into custody. He turned out to be a "crook" already well known to them,

who had recently escaped from the jail of a neighboring county and had somehow contrived to steal indoors and secrete himself at Mount Cedar that afternoon.

Julia having gone to bed, with Mrs. Hill watching over her, and Verena safe in her alcove under the gentle charge of Miss Dorinda, the "General" felt free to descend to the "Dragon's Den," where, with the door open into the kitchen, she awaited the coming of the police, curtly dismissing Almira with an order to go and read prayers in her stead. It would have been wiser to have sent one of the maids to sit beside Julia and thereby enable Mrs. Hill to go down into the parlor; but Miss Clive's mind for once was in a whirl, and Madame Verrier, whose Parisian tongue, although sufficient for very simple English conversation with the servants, would have wrought sad havoc with the language for devotional purposes, was thankful when the entrance of her humble colleague relieved her from the arduous task of trying to keep the girls' excited spirits within bounds, for, with few exceptions, the entire eighty-odd would talk of nothing save ghosts, robbers, hypnotism and the supernatural until an epidemic terror threatened to be the result.

Kate, who had a bad nervous headache, but on no account would have mentioned it and run the risk of being forthwith marched off to bed,

sat with Margaret, in the midst of the Thistles, drinking in fresh tributes to their valor, when, somewhat to her dismay, she saw Almira enter, involuntarily recalling how Verena on her arrival had been told by Fanny to be thankful that it was not her office to read prayers, or she would certainly have put in a petition for the new scholar as "this precious child now committed to our charge," who would have felt ready to sink through the floor. Miss Clive obliged the girls during prayers to kneel perfectly upright, in long parallel rows upon the carpet, their eyes closed and hands clasped, like statues on a monument, having established this "praying drill," as some irreverently termed it, in order to prevent the laughing or whispering only too likely to be carried on if they had been allowed to kneel comfortably, with their elbows upon chairs and their backs towards the authorities. Madame, this evening the only teacher present besides Almira, occupied a position directly opposite to her troop of scholars, and encircled by her own especial choir, at the organ, while the arm-chair usually tenanted by Mrs. Hill was taken by Miss Almira, a more than ordinary sternness and thoughtfulness upon her brow.

Kate, full of the pleasing necessity of keeping up her rôle of one who had helped to save the rest from probable peril, most virtuously

resisted taking notice of Cornie's half-perceptible nudge when, the usual evening prayers ended, Miss Almira, after a brief but very bashful pause, instead of giving out the hymn, to the horror of poor Madame and the mingled surprise and amusement of the pupils launched forth into an extemporaneous petition, or rather oration, wherein, while purporting to give thanks, she mixed up the different events of the evening in a style which would have sorely tried the self-control of an adult audience, and proved irresistible to a set of school-girls. Excited already, the sudden novelty caused countless faint titterings to be smothered with an effort as one after another of the scholars glanced up to behold poor Miss Almira's woe-begone countenance, her arms waving to and fro as she stood bolt upright, having started from her knees with a sort of involuntary jerk when the usual prayers were over. The girls, awaiting the signal to rise by the announcement of the hymn, kept motionless in wonder, though, as Fanny said afterwards, they should have followed Almira's example by starting up if their brains had not seemed spellbound.

Poor Miss Almira! A little tact would have enabled the good-hearted creature to avoid exposing herself to the ridicule of her astounded pupils, who had to hearken as best they might to a series of strangely worded phrases, pro-

fessing to be prayer, but describing the adventures of Verena and others, until even quiet Brownie stared in open-eyed amazement, and the woeful giggling from sundry quarters would certainly have drawn down Almira's wrath had she been able to heed anything save the torrent of words issuing from her own lips. Madame, divided between surprise and the painful effort to comprehend English employed in such peculiar fashion, scarcely looked at her scholars.

Margaret, already agreeably supplied with material for her next letter to her cousin, Helen Palmer (now traveling in Europe and eager for news of Mount Cedar), kept consoling herself for the long, painful kneeling upon the floor by treasuring up all phases of this novelty as sure to create a sensation; while Kate, likewise, at first enjoyed thinking how she should win approbation from even her uncle and Queen Bess by a thrilling account of this memorable evening in her next letter home. Desperately inclined to laugh, she grew perforce graver as the rambling, interminable prayer went on. Already exhausted, she was all at once seized with a sudden giddy faintness and oppression, a fluttering at the heart that made her gasp for breath. Her first thought, that she might be going to swoon and be more of a heroine than ever, yielded to terror at the strange, sickening sensations gaining upon her with every moment.

All that she knew about fainting had been chiefly gathered from stories and theatricals; she had scarcely been allowed to see Verena when she had swooned after her accident. She had a vague impression that it must be a very simple, easy affair, unaccompanied by any acute suffering. Oh, if she could only close her eyes, and sink gently, gracefully forward, as people did on the stage!—how fine it would be to “go off” and lie unconscious for some time, as Verena had done—it was just one of those things which seemed romantic and never likely to happen to Kate herself.

But this dreadful choking and dizziness, this loud ringing in her ears and dazzling sparks of fire floating up and blinding her eyes until Miss Almira’s figure opposite seemed to dilate into a giantess and dance about—what did it mean? Perhaps she might be sickening with some contagious disease and might have to be put into the infirmary for weeks, or be sent home to her uncle’s, where she was sure to be made to feel that she was giving entirely too much trouble. Christmas was approaching, and Kate’s fancy was secretly busied with a dramatic attempt in English, which she hoped to write, and get acted, before the holidays. The thought of all this was intolerable. And still poor, mistaken Miss Almira kept pouring forth her endless stream of words.

The tittering behind grew louder. Kate felt as though she were being hypnotized in earnest, as though all her own strength of will and self-control were leaving her, and passing into a mad, uncontrollable impulse to shriek and fling herself upon the floor, blended, even then, with the ludicrous conviction that, if she did so, the Thistles would never stop saying that she had adopted camp-meeting manners for the occasion. To be prayed for—she and Margaret—like any hysterical country lasses at a conventicle! Almira went on to speak of Verena, though not by name, in language wherein genuine good feeling mingled most strangely with the phraseology which she had been taught to consider proper for a prayer, until Kate, what between wanting to laugh and wanting to catch every word for her friend's future benefit, began to think that even a good fainting fit might be too dearly purchased if she had to miss hearing the whole. Cornie was quivering with half-choked laughter at her elbow, and Margaret, on the other side, nearly set off Kate by whispering, "She'll keep us here all night, on our wretched, stiff knees, to pay us up for all our sins, until she's done informing Providence of what has happened and what she expects Providence to do."

Perhaps, in her heart, Kate may have sympathized a little with poor Almira's eagerness

to improve this rare opportunity for asserting herself, seeing how sadly limited was her ordinary sphere. But even this feeling was put to flight when she heard herself and Margaret mentioned as the beloved pupils who had mercifully been selected to become the instruments for averting great perils to the school. Much as she loved acting, singing, reciting and coming forward in anything dramatic, Kate now suffered agonies of shamefacedness sufficient to atone for almost any amount of previous vanity, feeling her cheeks burn hotter and hotter, envying the amused coolness of Margaret at her side. This was, indeed, a way of "renowning it" which had never crossed her imagination, and she underwent enough mortification to have satisfied Julia & Co. in their most evil moods as her eighty schoolmates, opening their eyes still wider, turned towards herself and Margaret with a fresh outburst of subdued tittering that sounded piercingly through the ringing in her ears.

Whatever happened she must not faint now. All those girls would say she was conscience-stricken, or else shamming, in order to cut Miss Almira's praying short. She longed to fling her arms round Margaret, as her fellow-sufferer, and have a good cry. It was intolerable! Miss Almira wound up with a petition for Julia's recovery, but Kate's faculties began

to fail, and she hardly caught the words. Her bodily giddiness passed into a sort of mental stupor in which everything seemed unreal and like a painful dream. She heard the murmur from Almira's lips, heard it cease, caught a dizzy glimpse of the girls' forms rising and wavering; but her own limbs were powerless, and, just as Miss Clive entered the room, having seen the man taken off by the police, Kate, uttering a wild cry and vainly trying to cling to Margaret, sank down and lay unconscious on the floor.

There was no hymn sung at Mount Cedar that evening. Miss Clive, boiling over with blame for Almira, whom she justly accused of having caused this fresh worry by her abominable Methodistical holding forth, the last words whereof had smote upon her unwilling ears as she opened the door, dismissed the scholars to their beds, and, with Madame's aid, in a few minutes succeeded in reviving Kate, who unclosed her eyes to find herself alone with her two teachers, full of anxiety, displayed by vigorous but ungentle ministrations from Miss Clive and great tenderness on the part of Madame, who assisted her upstairs, undressed her, and contrived to maintain perfect order among the excited occupants of the dormitory, where Verena had fallen into a heavy sleep.

Kate was so worn out that she soon slept, and with Verena, who seemed rather drooping, was excused from her studies the next morning. Julia, on the contrary, awoke perfectly well, and in no way the worse for her so-called hypnotic trance, the genuineness whereof remained a matter of great doubt among the majority of her schoolmates, whose suspicions were much increased by the frequent bursts of laughter heard issuing during recess from her little room, whither she had retired with her chosen circle. Verena, who had really acted in perfect good faith towards Julia, profited by these doubts, inasmuch as they caused a reaction in her own favor, while Fanny declared that both the Hungarian and herself ought to receive a vote of thanks for starting the hypnotic experiment which had indirectly led to the discovery of the intruder. "Julia, as the Dragon would express it, has become an instrument therein by serving to scare Verena into running off; so there's good brought out of evil, and oh, girls, look here! The General has found out that I was not deceiving her, so she has made me the *amende* in this characteristic note:

" 'Mount Cedar Seminary, Nov. —, 18—.

" 'FRANCES EDITH FOX:

" 'You were right that evening. I was wrong. I am sorry to have doubted your word.

" 'ADELAIDE HELEN CLIVE.' "

CHAPTER XXVII.

A PHANTOM MASQUERADE.

THE last Saturday in November found Kate Armstrong, instead of joining in the noontide exercise out of doors, quietly stealing up to her alcove and carefully drawing the curtain across the doorway to prevent intrusion. Curling herself up on the bed in a sitting posture, she drew from her pocket many pieces of paper scribbled over in pencil, and made a frantic effort to induce an unpropitious muse to smile upon her work.

Her cherished secret hope of securing a repetition of the *Cloister in the Forest* had been abandoned. There were many reasons. All of those elder girls who had sustained the grown-up characters had left Mount Cedar, so that a new set would have had to be drilled in their place. The play itself was long, with scenic arrangements requiring time and trouble. No one, in fact, except Verena, Sophie Ursula and Margaret seemed disposed to make the effort, while the sensitive dramatist was inwardly much vexed by some innocent juvenile suggestions that it might be very nice to give

the first two acts and the dances, omitting the whole latter portion about the cloister, which they found rather heavy and only suited to the elder girls. Even the kindly Schulzes failed to encourage Kate in her half-expressed desire; and so, while appearing content to rest upon her laurels, she soon turned her thoughts towards something very different.

This new attempt, though in English, had given her far more trouble than the German fantasia, written in prose. Her young head, turned by the momentary success of her little drama, was now brimming over with the plan of a romantic play founded upon the history of the Rakotsky family, about whom she had recently been reading in a book upon Hungary belonging to her friend. Her chief reason was that Fanny and Verena were admirably suited, both in size and looks, to the rôles of the young sister and brother, Juliana and Francis Rakotsky, while for their beautiful widowed mother she had mentally selected Miss Clive, who on rare occasions had been induced to undertake a part otherwise hard to fill. For herself Kate had invented a rôle unmentioned in history, but fitting into her play in the shape of a noble German boy, a friend of Francis Rakotsky, who was, of course, to bear some heroic and romantic share in his sorrows, and (like Margaret and Sophie Ursula, for whom parts were to be written) to come to some heroic and romantic end.

The historical drama, and in blank verse, proved, as might have been expected, rather too tough an undertaking for a would-be dramatist not yet fifteen. In vain did Kate devote all her spare time for reading, and much that should have been spent in outdoor exercise, to working herself up into a state of poetic enthusiasm about young Francis Rakotsky (afterwards famed as the hero of "Rakotsky's March," and one of the boldest of Hungarian rebels against the Austrians) and his beautiful sister, whom their wicked enemy, the Cardinal, tore away from her mother and shut up in a convent—and their stern old Catholic grandmother, Sophia Bathöri, who led her Protestant daughter-in-law such a hard life in the castle of Munkács—and their stepfather, Count Emeric Tökölyi, who wanted to carry off his young stepson to the wars, despite his mother's tears.

She desired, of course, to write the deepest tragedy, but found this, or even the most ordinary dialogue quite impossible for her to handle with any ease when deprived of the scenic and supernatural accessories which enlivened her first performance. In vain she summoned the latter element to her aid by making the ghost of the noble Rakotsky *père*, and also the spirit of his wife's brave ancestor, Count Zrinyi (the hero of Körner's tragedy) appear to the wicked Cardinal and the hard

stepfather. In vain did she gratify to the utmost her passion for lying dead upon the stage and for romantic swoonings. Alas! Melpomene absolutely declined to bestow her patronage upon Kate Armstrong. As she would have expressed it, her "Donkey on Parnassus" proved more obstinate than a Kentucky mule, and would not go.

The worst of it was that the Thistles divined that she was composing; while Fanny, with her usual diabolical sharpness, had nicknamed Kate the "Tragic Muse." So the said muse, after some time wasted in writing, reading over, re-writing, tearing up and scratching out, concluded that it was of no use to try to work to-day, and gathered up her papers together, resolved to see whether the brisk run in the garden, which she should have taken ere now, would help to stimulate the languid flow of her invention.

The garden seemed to be deserted by her chief friends, and the tragic poet was compelled to seek distraction in jumping rope with the younger girls. Just as the violent exercise was beginning to restore a more healthy tone to her over-excited nerves she was startled, when standing with her head thrown back and elbows squared, ready to "run in backdoor," by hearing Brownie calling to her, with a message from the Thistles to join them in the gymnasium at a meeting of importance.

“Don’t be afraid,” said Brownie, seeing her hesitation. “Mrs. Hill knows all about it.”

Reassured, but still anxious, Kate raced after Brownie up into the gymnasium, where Verena, now fully recovered, was sitting with Fanny upon the horizontal bars, while Margaret and the Little Bear were running an aerial race upon the rings. Kate vented her own restlessness by traversing the room upon the third row of rings, landing beside Fanny, while the others quickly gathered round her.

“Kate,” began “Foxey,” solemnly yet with more than the usual merry twinkle in her dark eyes; “we Thistles all know perfectly well that you are engaged in another dramatic effort for our general edification, and we also feel assured that the aforesaid effort is of the most deeply dismal nature. Therefore, in the name both of our Thistles and of the entire school, I request your permission for and co-operation with a counter-irritant in the shape of an after-piece of some light and even frivolous sort, which may serve to refresh those who cannot endure the”——

“Nonsense, Foxey!” broke in Verena, unable to bear Kate’s aggrieved, puzzled look. “Don’t pretend to speechify in the General’s style. Listen, Kate, to the whole of it. Some of us have made up our minds that you mustn’t try to be the only dramatist of Mount Cedar and

keep all the laurels to yourself. You have given us the dramatic fever, and you must take the consequences."

"Yes," laughed Margaret, alighting on the bars beside Kate. "Your 'Donkey on Parnassus' has a whole troop of the long-eared brethren tearing at his heels"——

"Like that herd of wild asses that Arminius Vambéry described his meeting with in Central Asia," interrupted Sophie Ursula.

"Hush, Bear!" went on Verena, "we must proceed to business and try to 'engineer it on true Yankee principles,' as Foxey says, which means go straight ahead. Haven't I learnt the true American language at last? Don't be jealous, Kate; we're not likely to find

'A muse of fire, that shall ascend

The highest heaven of invention,'

and cut you out. We only want to get up a sort of extravaganza, verse when we can manage it, and prose if we can't. It's a Dialogue of the Dead, all about blue stockings and great men who were *Hausteufels*, and learned persons of both sexes who made things generally unpleasant for everyone. We have a fine list of henpecked roosters and rooster-pecked hens, who are to appear dressed as ghosts, in white sheets, with paper masks, and their names on a label round their necks, to prevent confusion. They are to belabor each other most beautifully

—strophe and antistrophe, in classic style, if you'll lend us a hand at the metre when we give out. Here they are," and she handed Kate a paper in Fanny's writing:

GRAND PHANTOM MASQUERADE.

Mount Cedar Seminary.

CHRISTMAS THEATRICALS, 18—.

SPIRITS REPRESENTED:

Socrates. .

Xanthippe, his Wife.

Dante Alighieri.

Gemma, his Wife.

Beatrice Portinari.

John Milton.

Mary,

Katharine,

Elizabeth,

Anne,

Mary,

Deborah,

Queen Elizabeth.

Lady Jane Grey.

Torquato Tasso.

Princess Leonora of Este.

King Henry VIII and his Six Wives.

} Milton's Three Wives.

} Milton's Three Daughters.

There were many other names on the list, but Kate dropped the paper with a peal of laughter.

“What fun! Fanny, who are you?”

“Xanthippe, of course! I have always, as you know, felt much sympathy for that much-tried and, as I think, misunderstood female. I intended, Kate, to have given you the rôle of Dante’s Beatrice, but Verena has chosen it for herself. I know you don’t fancy Lady Jane Grey, so the best I can do is to put you down for the ghost of Milton’s second wife—her name was Katharine, you know”——

“Try it, Kate,” broke in Margaret. “Fanny has cast me for the ghost of poor Mary Powell, which is highly appropriate, for, though I’m ready to kneel and worship him as a poet—when I think of some things he wrote about women I feel inclined to jump up and box his ears. Oh! he might have divorced *me* in a month, and I would have been glad to go!”

“Yes,” went on Fanny. “He will be well provided for between you two and the Bear, who will undertake the third wife, and we know will give it to her lord with great vigor. The Pearl of Pure Wisdom will have a most select and congenial triple part, and we shall expect great things from each one of you. Julia Maxwell”——

“Julia!” echoed Kate, aghast.

“Julia!” simultaneously re-echoed Margaret and the Little Bear; while Fanny continued, in her brisk way, scanning Kate’s countenance,

“Yes, Julia! She is to join forces with us and try whether the old feud can be healed. You have always hated her worse than anyone else did, and hardly given her credit for the brains she possesses—and she has a good deal. I know you’re going to begin talking about her pretending to be hypnotized—but it stands thus: Either Julia was really affected somehow—Verena can’t tell just how far she may not have mesmerized her—in which case she wasn’t to blame—or else she shammed it all, as many of us think, and kept up the farce with an energy and endurance it makes me shiver to imagine. Whichever way it was, it seems to be her parting fling, for we all have noticed that she hasn’t been half as bad since then, though perhaps you may have been too much absorbed in other things to have seen it. But you, Kate, ought to feel grateful to her, as I said before, for leading you to your glory about the robber, and your greater glory of that fine, first-class fainting fit, which made you so important that you were uncommonly amiable for a week at least. However, you must remember that this is decided upon, and is to be a frolic for the whole school. We told Mrs. Hill so when we asked permission. You must be willing to ‘set aside private enmities for the general good,’ as they say in books, though I know it will be a hard pill to swallow.”

“I suppose you’ve got that whole set of Nettles in it?” groaned Kate, sunk in misery at the recollection of those fragments of historical tragedy in her pocket, and unutterably thankful that not a word of their contents had been breathed to anyone. She felt completely upset, hardly knowing whether to follow Fanny’s advice or to let the whole affair alone. “Cecilia Morgan, too?”

“Of course. She is Lady Jane Grey, and Julia is Socrates,” said Verena, as though it were already settled. “It’s a ‘grand star combination’ of all the talent of Mount Cedar. Come, Kate, don’t be in the blues! We arranged it all before telling you, because we didn’t want to interfere with whatever you might be getting up. (“A shallow pretence,” Kate thought.) You can have your play first, and then we’ll have this, winding up with a grand hop of the entire school, dressed as phantoms, each one assuming a character and trying to talk up to it. That will give everybody a part, and we’ll all look exactly the same, and fare according to our deserts.”

“If we’re all to be masked, with nothing to distinguish us but a label, the plain ghosts will look as well as the handsome ones, and it will make death seem like the great leveler he is said to be in all the didactic books,” said Kate, beginning to recover her spirits.

“Decidedly an advantage for many persons,” said Fanny, and the Little Bear laughed. “Well, Kate, it’s very good of you to come round so easily, for I know this sort of burlesque thing isn’t in your line. We were afraid you might object, and refuse, instead of consenting to personate the shade of Mrs. Milton No. 2, and help lead the great spirit about.”

“Yes, but remember, Fanny,” answered Kate, “if you try to give me anything too outrageous to speak, I’ll have no scruples about serving you as you and Verena did me, and putting in just whatever I choose.”

And so the Phantom Play, with the Phantom Party following it, was chosen for the entertainment which should usher in the Christmas holidays. Kate, as might have been predicted, quietly allowed her own plans to drop and mentioned them to no one. The wind had been very gently but very completely taken out of her own sails, and she felt that the only thing for her to do was to turn about her little boat and bid it follow in the wake of the many crafts which were speeding so merrily across the waters. It cost her much pain; but, after all, there was a certain sense of freedom and relief in not being bound to beat out her brains over the woes of the young Rakotskys any more. It was a great come-down from the delicious stir and importance of being the poet-laureate of Mount Cedar,

but the December theatricals, after all, were conducted with far less show and importance than those in June, so she resumed her former position of a private though not unhonored member of the troupe, and bore the abrupt descent from her brief elevation with an outward equanimity that aroused even Fanny's respect. Julia, as "Foxey" had foretold, proved a most useful and clever ally, writing her own part and give many a hint to the others. Verena and she had apparently made up their former feud, and, at any rate, managed to get on in harmony for the nonce.

Brimful of sauciness, but with much humor mingled with its nonsense, the dramatic novelty, while necessarily devoid of those scenic aids and appurtenances which Kate so dearly loved (the dialogues being supposed to take place in some vague region represented only by a stage hung with light draperies resembling clouds) was able, as Fanny said, to stand on its own merits, and produced great mirth. All the wit of the school being let loose, the cavalier way of handling certain eminent persons may be imagined, for even Socrates, Dante and Milton, with other gentlemen more renowned in the indiscriminating and irreverent schoolgirl mind for their genius in public than for their domestic amiability, or any proper regard for the weaker sex at home, held spicy dialogues with the shades

of their respective wives and daughters, who, acting in the delightful capacities of Devil's Advocates, endeavored, by sundry charges of domestic tyranny, to tarnish the glory of their laurels.

Dante's Beatrice vainly attempted to fill the thankless office of a peacemaker, a part which the exiled poet's own spouse assured her she never would have undertaken had it been her evil destiny to become his wife, with seven young Alighieris on her hands to support when their sire was banished, instead of being an idealized lady love, to be only written about. Xanthippe won the hearts and excited the mirth of all hearers by the tale of what she had had to do and to suffer on behalf of her young ones while Socrates was off holding dialogues for the benefit of the youth of Athens, a chorus of whom, with the philosopher at their head, maintained the opposite side of the argument, vainly trying to close Xanthippe's mouth. Her humorous complaints were re-echoed by an indignant chorus of Milton's wives and daughters, while the great poet's spirit (led on the right by Mrs. Milton No. 2, who provoked No. 1 by occasionally taking his part, while No. 3, on his left, alternately abused him, Mrs. No. 1 and the three young ladies) joined Socrates in an eloquent diatribe against womankind. Lady Jane Grey, attempting to side with Milton, was put

down by the three Mrs. Miltons, who informed her that she ought to have lived a century later and have become the better half of their joint spouse, inasmuch as only a learned lady like herself, who could have treated him to private lectures in the choicest Greek and Latin, could ever have inspired him with anything like respect for the mind of a woman.

Queen Elizabeth's ghost, encountering that of her royal sire, pursued, like an Orestes by the Furies, by the shades of his unfortunate half-dozen of wives, undertook to treat him and her various stepmothers to her views on the subject of matrimony, as exemplified in his own case, and as avoided in hers. The whole ended with a grand dance of the entire school, assuming phantom-characters which afforded ample scope for the introduction of a thousand impromptu varieties and the sudden development of much unsuspected talent on the part of certain shy maidens, hitherto, perhaps, regarded as rather slow, and now glad of an opportunity for self-assertion under the protection of their ghost-like disguise.

The dancing was nearly over and the white-clad spectres did not observe that several of their train had already vanished, when Frau Schulze (who had supported a character and enjoyed it like any girl), advancing to the middle of the room, requested silence.

They fancied her about to make a speech, and withdrew in groups to either side. She said nothing; but, through the hall door of the long parlor, they saw entering five figures, no longer phantoms of illustrious mortals, but Thistles, in gay dresses, with allegorical devices befitting the Spirit of the Coming Year (Fanny Fox), followed by the Four Seasons—Verena, Margaret, Sophie Ursula and Kate.

The Seasons silently ranged themselves behind their leader, while Fanny, solemnly taking her stand in the midst, glanced round upon the surprised assemblage with her keen, bright eyes, and began:

“Ladies and gentlemen: (Herr Schulze, almost the only man present, here made a dignified bow.) It seems hardly fitting that a year like this, so soon to close, should pass from our school history without its record—without some words of mingled praise and blame for our own doings—our studious conduct, or our follies—and some hopeful prophecy for the new year we shall enter upon.”

Here she made a slight pause and some few listeners were half afraid that “Foxey” might be going to deviate so far from her usual line as to attempt a short sermon; but she again glanced round, and went on:

“We have had more novelty, more variety, more enjoyment than usual, and—let us hon-

estly grieve to add—have doubtless caused our elders more trouble and uneasiness than when we were younger, and had not so much individuality (Miss Clive, slow to seize the comic side of anything, drew herself up and knitted her beautiful black brows as she stood beside the arm-chair of Mrs. Hill, whose face fairly beamed with smiles at these frank avowals, encouraging the orator to proceed). Old, foolish feuds have been healed (Julia, from under her white mask, nodded meaningly to Verena, decked as Autumn, opposite). Fresh departures have been made in the line of our theatricals, and with unhoped-for success. (A compliment to Kate in particular, and the whole array of eager ghosts.) We have had our worries. Mistakes have sometimes marred our best and most innocent designs. (A hidden reference, understood by comparatively few, to Augustine Livingstone's luckless serenade.) Perhaps it may be granted to the Spirit of the Coming Year to prophesy a better state of things. It would be idle to venture to predict what destiny may have in store for us who are gathered here to-night."

"We will not try to bid farewell in the words of a valedictory. (This, intended for a covert fling at the would-be sad or solemn style affected by sundry valedictorians, and which Grace Howard's parting effort had done much to bring

into disrepute by its liveliness and good sense, caused a hearty laugh, while Herr Schulze waved his hand, exclaiming, “*Hoch!*—hear, hear!”) But, in general terms, we may be permitted to point towards a gradual settling down of certain too-effervescent spirits, to a series of well-earned prizes, of brilliant graduations—and in due time, as Shakespeare says, of

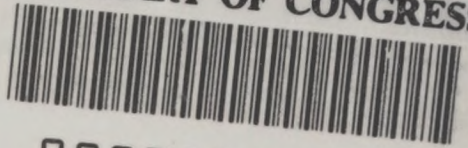
‘Honor, riches, marriage blessing,’
for many in the future (interpreted by a few as referring to their tenacious belief in a successful ending to the cruelly interrupted romance of the artist and Miss Clive). And so—with thanks to all who have helped us to be merry here to-night, and at other times, and heartfelt desire for pardon for our failings, let us close this, the last frolic of our term, with hopeful auguries of equal happiness, with many frolics, but with wiser conduct and more steady improvement for the ‘Thistles of Mount Cedar,’ and for all, in the year that shall soon be begun.”

Thus Fanny ended her prophecy; and in other pages we may see in what measure it was to be fulfilled.

[THE END.]

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